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BOOK X

Tenth Centum—First Decad (1-10)
(Tāḷa tāmarai)

Preamble

The declaration, made by the Saint in the preceding decad, that the Lord is the great Benefactor Who would grant 'Mokṣa' (eternal emancipation) when this body of ours falls off, is with reference to the clear assurance given to him by the Lord, to this effect. What looked earlier like an indefinite prospect has now acquired a concrete shape, time-bound, the farthest limit being the fall of the body at the end of the current span of life. Well, that he was fast nearing the end of his soul's journey, the Āḻvār was quite conscious of. His body had worn out to an extent that gave clear indication of its falling off very soon and the Āḻvār knew quite well that the day of his promised ascent to Heaven was near at hand. So then, the Āḻvār set about preparing for the final lap of his journey to the Celestium and sought the good offices of the Lord, in His worshippable form at Tirumōkūr, to escort him through. Finding the Lord at Tirumōkūr, as the super-abundant Benefactor, with profound knowledge and prowess, capable of steering through all obstacles, the Āḻvār got hold of Him as the unfailing escort, during his onward march to yonder Heaven.

But then, it might be questioned whether, during the soul's ascent to Heaven, the Lord's good offices should be specially requisitioned as above, seeing that the 'Arcis' and other functionaries do conduct the Heaven-bound souls and take charge of them at the various stages of the journey, in all their details. The answer to this poser can, however, be found in the Lord's own declaration in the carama śloka, delivered during His advent as Varāha Nāyaṇār (The Great Boar)—"Ahaṁ smarāmi Mad bhaktaṁ *nayāmi* paramāṁ gatim". The word in italics reveals that the Lord Himself conducts the liberated souls to the highest abode, namely, Heaven. This "Mārga Bandhu", the Āḻvār could spot out in the Lord at Tirumōkūr (near Maturai, in Tamil Nāḍu) and he, therefore, extols Him, in this decad. Apart from the Lord's attainments, His bewitching beauty is enough to make the Āḻvār follow Him, enjoying His exquisite charm, all along.

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tāḷa tāmarait taṭam aṇi vayal tirumōkūr
nāḷum mēvi, naṅku amarntu niṉṟu, acurarait takarkkum
tōḷum nāṅku uṭaic curi kuḻal, kamalak kaṇ, kaṇi vāyk
kāḷamēkattai aṉṟi, maṟṟoṉṟu ilam-katiyē. (X-1-1)

Translation

Escort have we none but the cloud-hued Lord,
With shoulders four that shall the Asuras smite,
Curly locks, lotus eyes and lips, red and bright,
Who does for ever dwell with great delight
In Tirumōkūr with strong-petalled lotus ponds and rich paddy fields.

Notes

(i) It is but natural that a person, roasted by gruelling heat, looks for relief through a deep plunge into a cool pond or showers from the sky. The Āḻvār, about to be rid of the parching heat of Saṃsāra, has likewise got hold of Lord ' Kāḷamēgam ', enshrined in Tirumōkūr. This Deity has also been referred to, later in this decad-vide eighth song, as the pond, cool and lovely, yielded by king Daśaratha, the safe Refuge, rather the one and only Refuge.

(ii) The lotus ponds and the paddy fields allude to the great ones, characterised by plain living (lying low, in utter humility, like the paddy crops studded with grains) and high thinking (like the lotus flowers, displayed majestically on the tall stalks sprouting from the watery depths).

(iii) The Lord resides in this sportive universe, with greater delight than in Heaven, because it is here that His auspicious traits of easy accessibility, tender solicitude etc., shine with greater splendour, like unto a lamp lit at night, as distinguished from one commissioned in broad day-light.

(iv) Even in His Arca or Iconic manifestation at Tirumōkūr, the Lord's sinewy shoulders proclaim the valorous deeds performed by them during His Avatāras (Incarnations),

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like unto the ear lobes, though not decorated with ear-rings at present, telling the tale of their erstwhile decoration.

ilam kati maṟṟoṉṟu emmaikkum-iṉ taṇ tuḷāyiṉ
alaṅkal am kaṇṇi, āyiram pēr utai ammāṉ
nalam koḷ nāṉmaṟai vāṇarkaḷ vāḷ tirumōkūr
nalam kaḷal-avaṉ aṭi niḷal taṭam aṉṟi, yāmē. (X–1–2)

Translation

Time without end, refuge have we none
But that lovely pond, the patronising shelter of the feet
Of the Lord, sporting tuḷaci garland, cool and fine,
Bearing a thousand names, Who has His feet firmly set
In Tirumōkūr, the abode of many a Vedic Scholar, sweet and sound.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār avers that there is no haven till the end of time, other than the lovely pair of feet of the Lord at Tirumōkūr, of exquisite charm, feasting the eyes, bearing the holy names that elevate the soul.

(ii) The Lord's feet know no partiality, granting, as they do, shelter to one and all, irrespective of whether they are high or low, good or bad. cf. 'anālocita viśeṣa aśeṣa Loka Śaraṇyā !' (Saint Rāmānuja's address to the Lord in 'Śaranāgati gadya').

(iii) When one starts lauding the Lord, enthralled by His exquisite charm and His sinewy shoulders, sporting the lovely garland, His names afford ample scope for the enjoyment of His great glory, from various angles. Further, it makes one repent for one's failure to recite the Lord's names bespeaking His great glory, in the days gone by.

aṉṟi yām oru pukaliṭam ilam eṉṟu eṉṟu, alaṟṟi
niṉṟu, nāṉmukaṉ araṉoṭu tēvarkaḷ nāṭa,
veṉṟu, im mūvulaku aḷittu uḷalvāṉ tirumōkūr
naṉṟu nām iṉi naṉukutum-namatu iṭar keṭavē. (X–1–3)

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Translation

May we from all our ills be free,
Getting well nigh Tirumōkūr, where stays the Lord,
Pledged to protect the worlds three,
Who did the arch enemies rid,
Of Nāṉmukān, Araṉ and other devas who for succour prayed
Unto Him, proclaiming many a time.
That refuge they had none but Him.

Notes

" The Lord at Tirumōkūr is the Universal Protector and we, His vassals, are keen on getting His protection. We will, therefore, do well to get near the holy city, seek shelter at the feet of the Lord, as an end in itself, and be rid of all of our miseries ", says the Āḻvār. Herein lies the difference between the Āḻvār's method of approach and that of Brahmā and other Devas who sought the Lord at the Milk-ocean, to secure their personal ends and the demoniac Kālayavanan, Jarāsanthan etc. who went to Mathura, bent upon evil.

iṭar keṭa emmaip pōntu aḷiyāy eṉṟu eṉṟu ĕtti,
cuṭar koḷ cōtiyait tēvarum muṉivarum toṭara,
paṭarkoḷ pāmpu-aṇaip paḷḷi koḷvān tirumōkūr,
iṭar keṭa aṭi paravutum, toṇṭīr! vammiṉē. (X–1–4)

Translation

Come, ye, devotees, worship we shall offer
At the Lord's distress-dispelling feet in Tirumōkūr,
Where He on the capacious serpent-bed lays
So as to grant audience unto sages and Celestials,
Who His resplendent Form adore and many a time utter,
" May it please You, my Lord, to come down here
And our ills and evils cure. "

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār invites the devout to come and worship the Lord, so easily accessible at Tirumōkūr and get rid of their miseries, *in toto*.

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(ii) The sages and Celestials approach the Lord, whenever they are brought up against difficulties, and seek relief through Him; the Āḻvār too seeks succour from the Lord and yet, he stands on a different footing from others, in that he seeks not personal gains but eternal service unto the Lord, in keeping with his essential nature of being His exclusive vassal. The Sages of Daṇḍakāraṇya exhibited their emaciated bodies, tormented by the Rākṣasas stalking the forest, to Śrī Rāma and sought from Him, mere restoration of their bodily comforts. In dire contrast to this, Saint Nammāḻvār prayed unto the Lord, right in the opening song of 'Tiruviruttam', the first of his four hymnals, to cut out altogether this bedevilled body of his, full of dirt and disorderly conduct.

toṇṭīr! vammiṉ-nam cuṭar oḷi oru taṉi mutalvaṉ,
aṇṭam mūvulaku aḷantavaṉ aṇi tirumōkūr,
eṉ ticaiyum īṉ karumpoṭu perum cennel viḷaiyak
koṇṭa kōyilai valañceytu, iṅku āṭutum kūttē. (X–1–5)

Translation

Come, ye, devotees, let us sing and dance and go round
The temple at lovely Tirumōkūr with paddy fields fertile, all around
And sweet cane crops all over, where dwells with great delight
The peerless Projenitor with resplendent Form exquisite,
Our Lord, Who spanned the three worlds of the Universe vast.

Note

The Lord at Tirumōkūr having attracted the Āḻvār by revealing His glory, as the first cause of all things and beings, and His exquisite Form, the Āḻvār wants to share this extra-ordinary bliss with those around. He, therefore, invites them all to join him, so that they may all go round the temple at Tirumōkūr, dancing in ecstasy.

kūttaṉ, kōvalaṉ, kutaṟṟu val acurarkaḷ kūṟṟam,
ettum naṅkaṭkum amararkkum muṉivarkkum iṉpaṉ,
vāytta taṉ paṉaivaḷa vayal cūḻ tirumōkūr
āttaṉ tāmarai aṭi aṉṟi, maṟṟu ilam-araṉē. (X–1–6)

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Translation

Shelter have we none but the lotus feet
Of our Sire at Tirumōkūr, replete
With paddy fields and water sheds, cool and bright,
The divine cow-herd of majestic gait,
Deadly unto the Asuras who would miseries on others inflict;
Unto us that extol Him and the Devas, He is sweet indeed.

Notes

(i) No doubt, Śiva is famous as the great dancer (Naṭarājaṉ), full of thrills, but Lord Rāma's very gait is said to have been entrancing—c.f. 'Agrataḥ *prayayau* Rāmaḥ' (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa) and equally majestic and enthralling was Lord Kṛṣṇa's gait.

(ii) While the Lord is deadly unto the Asuras who inflict miseries on the devout, He is very dear to His devotees, all alike, making no distinction between the 'Nitya Sūris' (Eternal Heroes) and the votary just admitted unto His fold. Could there be a greater friend and benefactor than the Lord Who keeps remembering His devotees, all the time, including those last moments of their lives when they remain unconscious and are no better than a piece of stone or log of wood, and conducts them to the highest state (Heaven)?

maṟṟu ilam araṉ-vāṉ perum pāḷ taṉi mutalāc
cuṟṟum nīr paṭaittu, ataṉ vaḷit toḷ muṉi mutalā
muṟṟum tēvarōṭu ulakuceyvāṉ tirumōkūr
cuṟṟi nām valaṅ ceyya, nam tuyar keṭum-kaṭitē. (X-1-7)

Translation

All our miseries will, in no time, be gone,
If we'd only go round Tirumōkūr where stays our Lord,
Who did usher in the universe vast, water-bound,
The primordial matter unique, which pleasures do yield
Of both the worlds, prajāpati, the hoary Sage

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And the worlds peopled by Devas of all grades;
Other than this hallowed city, haven have we none.

Notes

(i) Would it be an exaggeration if the Āḻvar said that there is no Refuge other than the holy city of Tirumōkūr? No, not at all, for there dwells our Lord, the great Benefactor of all times, Who ushered in the entire Universe surrounded by the perepheral waters, pressed into service the Primordial Matter (Mūla Prakṛti) whence spring up things that make people earth-bound, enjoying the sensual pleasures or Heaven-bound, as the case may be, propagated the worlds with their colourful varieties through the Four-headed Brahmā, and is thus referred to herein, as the ancient Sage whose mind is deeply absorbed in the great task of .creation.

(ii) If we circum-ambulated the holy centre, all our miseries, including our anxiety as to who would guide us in our ascent to Heaven, would vanish in a trice.

tuyar keṭum kaṭitu; aṭaintu vantu aṭiyavar! toḻumiṉ-
uyar koḻ cōlai oṉ taṭam aṇi oḻi tirumōkūr,
peyarkaḻ āyiram uṭaiya val arakkar pukku aḻunta,
tayaratan̄ peṟṟa marakata maṇit taṭattiṉaiyē. (X-1-8)

Translation

Ye, devotees, all your miseries shall, in no time, disappear
If you'd come and worship the Tank, studded with sapphire,
King Tayaratan̄ did yield, where the fell Rakṣasas, who bore
A thousand names, met their inglorious end,
Our Sire Who dwells in Tirumōkūr, with stately gardens and lovely ponds.

Notes

(i) Pond inside the temple at Tirumōkūr as well as outside! The ponds, outside the temple precincts, are studded with lotus while the Lord, enshrined within, looks like yet another such lotus pond, what with His complexion resembling the lotus leaf, His eyes and lips, hands and

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feet, looking like the red lotus in fresh bloom. Śrī Rāma, the valiant son of King Daśaratha, is figuratively likened to a tank studded with blue gems (sapphire), the hot bed of destruction of the dastardly Rākṣasas. Tanks are beneficial to those who seek to bathe therein or slake their thirst. There are, however, some who fall into them and commit suicide. It is significant that the Lord did not, on His own, destroy the Asuras and Rākṣasas but they courted disaster and met their ignominious end at the hands of the Lord, like unto the winged caterpillars rushing to the burning lamps and getting roasted to death, in large numbers.

(ii) If the Lord earned a thousand names by virtue of His benevolence, so did the Rākṣasas too, by dint of their cruelty, such as "Yajña Śatru", "Brahma Śatru" etc.

maṇit taṭattu aṭi, malark kaṇkaḷ, pavaḷac cevvāy,
aṇik koḷ nāl taṭam tōḷ teyvam, acurarai eṉṟum
tuṇikkum val araṭṭan uṟai poḻil tirumōkūr
naṇittu; nammuṭai nal araṇ nām aṭaintaṇamē. (X–1–9)

Translation

Blest are we with Tirumōkūr, near at hand,
Our sure haven, with many a lovely garden around,
Where dwells our mighty Lord, Who the Rākṣasa hordes
Would ever annihilate, the Supreme One with comely shoulders four,
With coral lips and lotus eyes, Whose lovely pair
Of feet are like unto a tank, cool and clear.

Note

The Āḻvār rejoices that Tirumōkūr, the safe haven, is near at hand. It is a lovely place with a beautiful setting and there dwells the Lord Whose pair of feet are like unto a cool tank, lovely and limpid, Whose eyes are like the red lotus in fresh bloom, and lips are coral red, Whose sinewy shoulders bespeak His enormous strength that can smash to smithereens the Rākṣasa hordes, antagonising Him.

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nām aṭainta nal araṇ namakku eṉṟu, nal amarar
tīmai ceyyum val acurarai añcic ceṉṟu aṭaintāl,
kāma rūpam koṇṭu, eḻuntu, aḻippāṉ tirumōkūr
nāmamē naviṉṟu eṉṉumiṉ, ēttumiṉ, namarkāḷ! (X-1-10)

Translation

Better learn, my men, to contemplate and reverently utter
The holy name of Tirumōkūr where stays our Lord to cater,
Assuming the form of His choice, to the pious Devas that bend
Before Him, frightened by the Asuras who on them miseries land,
Seeing in Him, the Refuge, safe and sound.

Note

The Āḻvār invites those that are inclined to listen to him to utter the name of Tirumōkūr and adore that holy centre where stays the great Benefactor, ever ready to extend protection to His devotees, assuming the appropriate Form, at His sweet volition. Well, this is the place where even the Devas come and take refuge, frightened by the formidable Asuras, hell-bent to land them in miseries.

ēttumiṉ namarkāḷ! eṉṟu, tāṉ kuṭam āṭu
kūttaṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ kuṟṟēvalkaḷ
vāytta āyirattuḷ ivai vaṉ tirumōkūrkku
itta pattu ivai ētta vallārkku iṭar keṭumē. (X-1-11)

Translation

The woes shall be gone of those that chant these songs ten,
Assigned to Tirumōkūr, from out of the thousand of Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, composed as a piece of service divine,
Adoring the Lord Who did the pot-dancing great,
Inviting the pious on-lookers to sing His glory with all their might.

Notes

(i) These ten songs have been doled out to Tirumōkūr, out of the thousand composed by the Āḻvār, in adoration of

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Lord Raṅganātha, the cloud-hued Lord enshrined in the walled city of Srirangam, Vide also notes below VII-2-11. The chanters of this decad will be rid of all miseries, including the anxiety to secure a suitable escort, during their ascent to heaven, which is assured to them at the end of the current span of life.

(ii) When Lord Kṛṣṇa did the pot-dancing, He exhorted the people around, as follows:

" May those of You that admire my valorous deeds, sing my glory as lustily as your gift of speech can cope with. " This goes to show that the Lord's deeds were exhilarating unto Him and others alike. Such a Lord is lauded by the Āḻvār through appropriate songs, set in choice diction.

Tenth Centum Second Decad (X-2)
(Keṭum iṭar)

Preamble

In this decad, the Āḻvār lauds the glory of the Lord, in His worshippable form at Tiruvaṇantapuram (in Kerala State). As we go on, we will find the Āḻvār calling successively at the holy centres of Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, Tirumāliruñcōlai, Tiruppēr and adoring the Lord enshrined in those places. A similar treatment is noticeable in the case of Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār also. He is found calling on the Lords of many holy places, all of them in a single decad of the tenth Centum (X-1) of his grand apocalypse (Periya Tirumoḷi). When asked by Naṅcīyar to elucidate this visiting spree on the part of that Āḻvār, Bhaṭṭārya brought home the import, in a very telling manner. He said: " Don't you know, Son, when a girl is given in marriage, there comes a time when she has to leave her parental roof for that of her husband and that it is but natural that she then goes about visiting her relations and friends at this end, to take leave of them. So does the Āḻvār, as the time for departing to Heaven draws near; on the eve of his departure from this abode, he takes leave of the Lord in His worshippable form, at the various shrines over here, who did, as a matter of fact, instil and enrich his love for God in Heaven. "

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Having been assured of his ascent to Heaven at the end of the current span of life, (IX-10-5), Saint Nammāḷvār quite well knew that the day of his ascent was near at hand. And that is why he has actively embarked on a programme of leave-taking.

ketum iṭar āya ellām, kecavā! eṉṉa; nāḷum
koṭuviṉai ceyyum kūṟṟiṉ tamarkaḷum kuṟukakillār;
viṭam uṭai aravil paḷḷi virumpiṉāṉ curumpu alaṟṟum
taṭam uṭai vayal aṉantapuranakar pukutum iṉṟē. (X-2-1)

Translation

Right this day shall we enter holy Aṉantapuram
In whose ponds and fields fertile do merry bees hum,
Where the Lord reposes lovingly on His serpent-bed;
Your entry into the holy city. Yama's agents dare not impede,
Though they are known to torment continually; if we do but utter
The holy name, 'Kēcava', all our sins shall forthwith disappear.

Notes

(i) There could pos ibly be quite a few things, standing in the way of one's entry into the holy city of Aṉantapuram, (Tiruvaṉantapuram, the capital of Kerala State) which the Āḷvār now longs to laud and enjoy. But then, the Lord's names are handy enough to dispel the sins of the chanters of these names and thus remove all the impediments in the way of their achieving the desired objective. Among the several meanings, conveyed by the holy name 'Keśava', the one which would be most apt in the present context, is: the destroyer of the horse-shaped fiend, named Keśi, set up by King Kamsa to kill Kṛṣṇa, the Divine Child. 'Keśi', the demon, typifies enemies in general and the mere mention of the name of the Lord, denoting His destruction of just one enemy, that is, Keśi, is enough to destroy all our enemies, that is all our sins, that stand between us and the Lord. Did not the single offender (Rāvaṇa) bring on the destruction of his entire race? It needn't, for a moment, be doubted whether the sins already committed could at all be

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wiped off, in this manner, without the sinners getting into the clutches of Yama's hordes, determined to put the former through the tortures of hell. Well, here is the magic, namely, spelling the word 'Keśava', which at once keeps Yama's agents out of bounds and there is no question of their coming anywhere near us. Here is a single remedy, the panacea for all ills and evils, unlike the scriptural prescription of different methods of atonement of different types of sins.

(ii) Yama is, no doubt, the agent appointed by God for punishing the law-breakers, the laws being the Śāstras, with their decrees and injunctions. But those, who are engaged in the service of the Lord in His worshippable form, wrapt in ecstatic contemplation of the Lord exquisitely manifest in His image, will certainly be out of the purview of Yama's punishment, if they departed from the punctual and rigid observance of the Śāstraic routine. This was clearly elucidated by the illustrious Bhaṭṭārya, one evening when Lord Raṅganātha was moving by the river-side, during one of the annual festivals, entailing excursions outside the holy city of Araṅkam. When a few of the Brahmin attendants expressed their intention to retire for performing the evening prayer (Sandhyāvandhana), Bhaṭṭārya observed :

" Brothers, in our present occupation, namely, absorbing attention to our Sovereign Lord Himself, of exquisite charm, visibly present here, if we skip the religious routine, just this evening, know that we are occupied with the Law-Giver Himself. Surely, Yama will not construe this as a transgression and accuse us as law-breakers, liable for punishment. Supposing a king holds court to hear reports of the financial working of the various departments of his kingdom and, in the course of hearing, adverse mention is made of a favourite of the king. If the king orders the reporter to skip over that particular item and pass on to the next, will the reporter thenceforward dare to revert to that item, deliberately skipped over by the king, and point

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the accusing finger at the king's favourite? When we are here, busy with the king directly, what other business can draw us away from Him? All ordinary law is set aside before the Lord Who is the highest Law Himself".

iṉṟu pōyp pukutirākil, eḷumaiyum ētam cārā:
kuṉṟu nēr māṭam māṭē kuruntu cēr cerunti, puṉṉai,
maṉṟu alar poḻil aṉantapuranakar māyaṉ nāmam
oṉṟum ōr āyiramām; uḷḷuvārkku umpar ūrē. (X-2-2)

Translation

Sins shall not get near you for generations,
If You'd this day get into Aṉantapuram with gardens fine,
Holding stately trees and castles tall, rising like mountains;
A single name of the Lord, enshrined there, is as potent
As a thousand names and for those, who that name do chant,
That holy Centre becomes the very Heaven indeed.

Notes

(i) "The name of the Lord at Aṉantapuram shall by itself extend unto you protection, on all fronts. If you'd only get into that holy centre, sins shall not come near you, not only now but in all successive births", this is how the Āḻvār exhorts the people around. The mere mention of the name of the Lord, enshrined there, will transform that place into Heaven. Yet another way of interpreting the text of this song is that one need not even go to Aṉantapuram, as such, but one is assured of heavenly ascent, by merely spelling out the name of the Lord enshrined there, a name that is potent enough to fulfil the functions of the other names, as well.

(ii) "*Castles rising like mountains*"—Unlike the ordinary run of man-kind, given to hurrying, those soaked in God-love move about leisurely, enjoying the sight of the high mansions, turrets and towers lining the streets of pilgrim centres, drinking them in, as it were, with their eyes, in rapturous admiration.

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ūrum puḷ; koṭiyum aṯtē; ulaku ellām uṇṭu umiḷntāṉ
oērum taṉ aṉantapuram cikkeṉap pukutirākil,
tīrum nōy viṉaikaḷ ellām tiṇṇam; nām aiiyac coṉṉōm;
pērum ōr āyirattuḷ oṉṟu nīr pēcumiṉē. (X-2-3)

Translation

If You'd only reach Aṉantapuram, cool and lovely, with a mind firm,
Where dwells our Lord Who has Garuḍa as His vehicle
And banner too, Who once ate up the worlds, one and all,
And then spat them out, let me unto you affirm,
You will be rid of all your ills and evils,
Better utter any one of His thousand names.

Note

"Any one of the Lord's thousand (innumerable) names is potent enough to destroy all evils. So then, chant but one such name and get rid of all your sins", exhorts the Āḷvār. The votaries are asked to enter the holy city of Aṉantapuram with firm determination and get their sins destroyed. On reaching the place, no difficult task is set unto them by the Āḷvār; they are required to do nothing more than chant just one of the many holy names of the Lord, the great Deliverer.

pēcumiṉ kūcam iṉṟi-periya nīr vēlai cūḷntu
vācamē kamaḷum cōlai vayal aṇi aṉantapuram
nēcamceytu uṟaikiṉṟāṉai neṟimaiyāl malarkaḷ tūvi,
pūcaṉai ceykiṉṟārkaḷ puṇṇiyam ceytavāṟē. (X-2-4)

Translation

Speak out, with no mental reserve,
What indeed is the penance performed
By those that worship, with choice flowers,
The Lord, who delightfully dwells in Aṉantapuram, well adorned

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By fields fertile and gardens full of fragrance sweet
And surrounded by the oceanic waters vast.

Note

The Āḻvār extols those that have the good fortune to worship the Lord at Tiruvaṉantapuram whose gardens are so full of fragrance that it more than offsets the possible stench of the sea around. It is by-no-means surprising that the denizens of the High Heavens, marked by spotless purity and overwhelming devotion to the Lord, worship Him there, in that transcendent setting, with punctilious care and attention. It would, however, be most surprising, rather praiseworthy, if, in this land of dark nescience, quite a few resorted to the worship of the Lord, like unto lotus blooming in the hearth, fed by fire to the brim.

puṇṇiyam ceytu, nalla puṉalotu maḷarkaḷ tūvi,
eṇṇumiṉ entai nāmam; ip piṟapṟu aṟukkum; appāl,
tiṇṇam nām aṟiyac coṉṉōm-ceṟi poḷil aṉantapurattu
aṇṇalār kamala pātam aṇukuvār amarar āvār. (X-2-5)

Translation

Meditate on the holy names of our Lord
And unto Him offer with devotion supreme,
Water, pure and simple, and flowers fine, to get rid
Of this fell bondage of Samsāra; let me affirm,
Those that get near the lotus feet of our Sire
At Aṉantapuram, with many a garden fine,
Are as good as the Eternal Angels in Heaven.

Note

The Āḻvār exhorts the people to approach the Lord at Aṉantapuram and adore His lotus feet, affirming that, by so doing, they will rise to the stature of the 'Nitya Sūris' in Heaven. By sacramental water for the Lord's worship is meant only water, pure and simple, and not the one spiced and flavoured with cloves and cardamoms, the emphasis being on the easy worshippability of the Lord. Mere meditation on the holy names of the Lord will grind to a halt the dreadful

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cycle of birth and death. There is also no restriction whatsoever, in regard to the persons eligible to indulge in meditation. All that is needed is the mere desire to spell out the Lord's holy names. There is scarcely a felicity which the recital of the holy names does not confer and he, who seeks separate means to enable him to recite the Lord's names, is as ludicrous as the one attempting to cleanse himself in a petty pool of brackish water, preparatory to having a dip in the holy Ganga, as the illustrious Bhaṭṭārya would put it. When a man stumbles on the road, at once he cries out 'Ammā!" To cry so, is any qualification needed? No; even so, no special qualification is needed to recite the Lord's holy names.

amararāyt tirikiṉṟārkaṭku ātı cēr aṉantapurattu
amarar-kōṉ arccikkiṉṟu; aṅku akap paṇi ceyvar viṉṉōr;
namarkaḷō! collak kēḷmiṉ; nāmum ṟōy naṉukavēṇṭum–
kumaraṉār tātai tuṉpam tuṭaitta kōvintaṉārē. (X-2-6)

Translation

Worship the Lord, Who the distress did dispel
Of Kumaraṉ's sire, Chief of the Immortals chuckling with pride,
Who in holy Aṉantapuram does lovingly dwell,
Sēṉāpathi Āḷvāṉ, as the head of the Celestials, does lead
And him others from Heaven do ably support;
Ye, my men, listen to what I state,
We too shall that holy band join and adore the Lord.

Notes

(i) Holy Aṉantapuram is to be coveted even more than Heaven, inasmuch as the former attracts even the exalted denizens of Heaven who move down from those dizzy heights and serve the Lord enshrined here. Here then is a pilgrim centre, where parity is enjoyed by the 'Nitya Sūris' of Heaven and the 'Nitya Samsāris', down here. The Lord's face, navel and feet are seen through three separate doors of the Sanctum, catering to three different categories of worshippers, namely, (1) the band of Celestials headed

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by Sēṇāpathi Āḷvāṉ to whom the Lord reveals His face through the doorway at one end, (2) Brahmā and other Devas who catch sight of the Lord's navel region through the passage in the middle and (3) people of this world, who worship the Lord's lovely pair of feet through the doorway at the other end. vide aphorism 183 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam'. As a matter of fact, Sēṇāpathi Āḷvāṉ, who has been assigned the portfolio of administration of the Universe, has to necessarily look at the Lord's face and obtain His approval for the proposals submitted by him, either by word of mouth or merely by His gestures and looks. Again, Brahmā, who emerged from the Lord's navel, sees the Lord's navel region at Aṉantapuram through the middle gate. We, world'ings, seeking refuge at the Lord's feet, see His feet through the end-gate.

(ii) Surely, the Lord, Who dispels the distress of even Śiva, the father of Subrahmaṇya and the other Devas, full of egotism, will certainly deliver us, the selfless lovers.

tuṭaitta kōvintaṉārē, ulaku, uyir, tēvum, maṟṟum
paṭaitta em parama mūrttı, pāmpu-aṉaip paḷḷi koṇṭāṉ,
maṭaittalai vāḷai pāyum vayal aṉi aṉantapuram
kaṭaittalai ciykkapperṟāl, kaṭuviṉai kaḷaiyalāmē. (X-2-7)

Translation

Your deadly sins will get dissolved if you'd resort
To Aṉantapuram, which fields fertile do adorn,
And clean up the door-step of the temple where reclines
On serpent-bed, the Lord Supreme who dissolved the worlds
And then put them back into the respective folds.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār affirms that those, who render service unto the Lord reclining at Tiru-Aṉantapuram, will get rid of their age-long sins, however deadly they might be. Of the several kinds of service, prominence is given to cleaning up the temple gates and keeping the temple front, bright and tidy.

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(ii) The wiping off of the worlds, that is, the Lord's act of dissolution or destruction of the Sportive Universe, 'Līlā Vibhūti' is mentioned first and then the creation. This is because Vedāntas speak of dissolution first. As a matter of fact, the 'Samsāra' or the cycle of birth and rebirth is much-too-old and its beginning is just not known. The dissolution is but eating up all the worlds, with their contents and sustaining them all, inside the Lord's stomach, from being swept off by the whirling waters of the Deluge. Creation is but spitting them out, at the end of the Deluge and putting things back in their respective folds.

kaṭuviṇai kaḷaiyalākum; kāmaṇaip payanta kāḷai
iṭavakai koṇṭatu eṇpar, eḷil aṇi aṇantapuram;
paṭam uṭai aravil paḷḷi paviṉṟavaṉ pātam kāṇa
naṭamiṉō, namarkaḷ uḷḷīr!-nām umakku aṟiyac coṉṉōm.
(X–2–8)

Translation

Go and behold, my men! the lovely pair of feet of our Lord,
The mighty Sire of Kāman, Who has pretty Ānantapuram as His abode,
Who does on a Cobra with many a hood recline ;
That you may be rid of your deadly sins,
I do, unto you all, make this known.

Notes

(i) Saint Nammāḷvār exhorts the pious Vaiṣṇavas around, to proceed to holy Aṉantapuram and behold the lovely feet of the Lord, reclining there on serpent-couch. The form, this exhortation assumes, is noteworthy; even as people are proceeding towards the holy centre, their deadly sins fall off, this is how the Āḷvār puts it.

(ii) Here is an interesting anecdote; Maṇakkāl Nampi, the preceptor of Āḷavantār (Yāmunācārya) had taught the distinguished disciple all but Yoga Śastra, which was deliberately left over, to be taught by a great Yogi, by name Kurukaikkāvalappaṉ. When Āḷavantār approached the Yogi in question for learning from

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him the Yogic secrets, the latter fixed up a date on which Āḷavantār was to meet the preceptor again and start receiving instructions in Yoga. The appointed date was duly noted in a small scrap of paper and it was kept by Āḷavantār in safe custody. But then, the 'Tirumoḷi' and 'Tiruvāymoḷi' festivals, each of ten days' duration, went on at a stretch in Śrīraṅgam, with the special service of the Arayar, the temple minstrel, in the holy presence of Lord Raṅganātha. Āḷavantār was an active participant, being at the head of the distinguished gathering of listeners. When this particular song was recited with great emphasis by the Arayar, facing Āḷavantār, the latter reacted so well that he at once set out for Aṉantapuram along with his disciples. As Nampiḷḷai would put it, Āḷavantār reacted, as above, because that was the surest way of securing contact, rather, becoming associated with Nammāḷvār, within the meaning of the phrase "My men" (Namarkal), occurring in this song. Well, one of those days, when he was staying in holy Aṉantapuram worshipping Lord Padmanābha, Āḷavantār recollected that he was to meet Kurukaikkāvalappaṉ, the Yoga instructor and looked up the chit, in his custody. It so happened that it was the very day on which he had to meet the Yogi and Āḷavantār heaved a sigh of grief, saying, "What a pity! I have not got a special vehicle to transport me just now!"

nām umakku aṟiyac coṉṉa nāḷkaḷum naṉiya āṉa;
cēmam naṉku uṭaittuk kaṇṭīr, ceṟi poḻil aṉantapuram;
tūmam, nal virai malarkaḷ tuvaḷ aṟa āyntukoṇṭu,
vāmaṉaṉ atikku eṉṟu ētta, māyntu aṟum viṉaikaḷ-tāmē.

(X-2-9)

Translation

The days, I spoke to you about, are drawing near,
Here's Aṉantapuram, You see, with orchards fine, our haven safe,
Do go there with choice flowers and incense pure

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For Lord Vāmana's worship and meditate; Your sins will fall off
By themselves, I am quite sure.

Notes

The Āḻvār has already stated, vide IX-10-5, that he will reach the Heaven, the destined Land, at the end of the current span of life, as vouchsafed to him by the Lord at Tirukkaṇṇapuram. He now reverts to that and says that the crucial day of his departure from this world is drawing near and invites the worldlings to listen to his advice and prosper. Once he departs from this world, who else is there to tender such wholesome advice and even if there be yet another, who will listen to him? This is precisely how Lord Kṛṣṇa advised Yudhiṣṭira to go and receive instructions in the intricacies of morality and ethical values, at the feet of Bhīṣmācār, who lay on his death-bed made up of arrows, awaiting the dawn of Uttarāyaṇa for giving up his mortal coil.

Lord Kṛṣṇa, though an Avatāra Himself, exhorted Yudhiṣṭira to learn all truths from Bhīṣma. The Lord is Truth itself and yet, He would go unheard by the commonalty; at any rate, He may not be heard as well as they listen to the Truth-seers (Tatva Darśis). That is why He told Arjuna, vide Bhagavad Gita, IV-34, "By prostrations, by fair questioning and by reverential service to Truth-seeing Saints, learn, for they shall teach you wisdom". As a matter of fact, all spiritual teaching has value only when it proceeds from recognised authority. One Pariñai Appar used to quote Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's observation in this regard, as follows: "Unless the custodian of an article is a person of worth, the article loses value, both in the hands of the giver and the taker."

māyntu aṟum viṉaikaḷ-tāmē, mātavā! eṉṉa; nāḷum
ēynta poṉ matiḷ aṉantapuranakar entaikku eṉṟu,
cāntoṭu viḷakkam, tūpam, tāmarai malarkaḷ nalla
āynṭu koṇṭu, ētta vallār-antam il pukaḻiṉārē. (X-2-10)

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Translation

All your sins will go off, on their own, when you utter
The name ' Mâtavaṉ '; undying fame shall in them vest that offer
With ardour great, fine sandal paste, lamp and incense and gather
Lotus flowers nice, for the diurnal worship of the Lord
At holy Aṉantapuram, the city bounded by walls of solid gold.

Notes

(i) The name, ' Mâtavaṉ ', (Mâdhava) denotes the Lord, in conjunction with Mahâlakṣmi, the Divine Mother and it is but natural that all our miseries die off, when we ejaculate the Lord's name, betokening this highly benevolent combination of our eternal Father and Mother.

(ii) Serving the Lord with due ceremonies and worshipping Him uninterruptedly, free from distractions, in the High Heavens, is by-no-means a matter of surprise, because that is the land of unalloyed bliss and beatitude, rid of all impediments to the continual meditation and worship of the Lord. Unlike the denizens of the High Heavens, who hold an unbroken rapport with the Lord, the inexhaustible fountain of bliss, here, in this land of darkness and nescience, with its numerous distractions, if there are at least some who procure, with great care and devotioin, choice materials with which to worship the Lord in His worshippable Form, it is indeed a matter for great surprise; surely, these are men of undying fame, indeed.

antam il puka| aṉantapuranakar âti-taṉṉaik
kontu alar poḻil kurukûr mâṟaṉ col âyirattu|
aintiṉôṭu aintum vallâr aṉaivar, pôy amar ulakil,
paintoṭi maṭantaiyar-tam vêy maru tôḷ-iṉaiyê. (X-2-11)

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Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṇ
Of Kurukūr, with orchids fine, adoring the Lord of everlasting fame,
Who has His abode in lovely Aṇantapuram,
Shall attain Heaven at the end of the current span
And there be entertained by the damsels fine
With bamboo-like arms, bedecked with jewels nice.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār extolled those who worship the Lord at Aṇantapuram, as men of undying fame; now, he is referring to the Lord as of undying fame. Even as the pious men of this world have surpassed the fame of the denizens of Heaven, the Lord, in His worshippable Form in this abode, excels His own transcendent glory in the High Heaven. Whereas all those, in the high Heaven, have the true knowledge of their essential nature as the Lord's exclusive vassals, totally dependent on Him, here, in this abode, there are myriads of men straying away from God, oblivious of their true relationship with Him. Does it not, therefore, redound to His great glory, right here, when He tries to wean away the errant mortals, gone astray? But for His tender solicitude and redemptive grace, these poor souls would be drifting farther and farther away from Him.

(ii) What is alluded to, in this end-song, as the benefit accruing from the recital of this decad, is not the sensual pleasure enjoyable by the chanters on their attaining Heaven through the 'Apsaras', the lovely damsels over there. Indeed, there is no touch of carnality, the skin-deep variety of entertainment, in that blissful land and the entertainment offered by these damsels who play host to the new-comers to Heaven, is the same as that referred to later in X-9-6, 7 and 10,

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Tenth Centum—Third Decad (X-3)
(Vēy maru tōḷ iṇai)

Preamble

The Āḻvār, who longed, in the preceding song, for the felicity of divine service unto the Lord at Tiru-Aṉantapuram, accompanied by the pious band of Śri Vaiṣṇavas, was struck down by a deep sense of frustration, when his aspiration did not materialise. So deep was his frustration indeed, that it led him to suspect the frightful possibility of the Lord perpetuating his bondage and prolonging his stay in this abode. Of course, such an apprehension is not out of place, when one sees the notoriety of the material contact (body), with its great potentiality for mischief, on the one hand, and the Lord's unbridled independence (Svātantarya), on the other. The Āḻvār, however, expresses his apprehension, in an indirect way in this decad, instead of putting it to the Lord, point-blank. He cloaks his own misgivings by referring to the misgivings, entertained by the shepherdesses of Virundāvan, who started nagging Kṛṣṇa, the naughty cow-herd boy, even in the early hours of the morning, the pre-dawn period. No doubt, He was still lying in bed on the crucial morning but He used to leave his bed, by about this time, and take the cattle out for the pasture. The same sequence prevails this morning also, that is, the cool breeze is blowing, the Koels have started cooing, the peacocks are strutting about and the herds of cows and calves are seen spread out, all over the place. So great is His loving care for the Cattle that He would surely follow and tend them, relegating to the background His concern for the Gopis who cannot, however, brook His separation, even for a short while. And so, the Gopis conclude that Kṛṣṇa would not make any exception on this particular morning and stay behind. Their minds get agitated over the certainty of Kṛṣṇa's departure from their midst, to such an extent that they start experiencing the pangs of separation even when He is very much by their side. One of them would lustily plead with Him that He shall not leave them and go out into the fields, firstly, because they cannot bear being apart from Him for a whole day, which actually looms like ages in their aching minds, and secondly, because of the lurking danger to His life at the hands of Kamsa's evil spies and agents who keep on masquerading, in one form or another, all over the place.

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This decad, however, ends on a jubilant note, with a sense of clarity induced by the Lord's assurance to the Gopis that He shall not depart from their midst. He tells them: " What indeed is the amazing extent of your love for Me! You should pine for Me, only when I am away from you but I am still by your side ". So saying, the Lord casts His bewitching smiles on the Gopis, in token of His appreciation of the exuberance of their love for Him. Reference to the red lips, sporting this smile which is quite reassuring, is made in the tenth song of this decad. With this assurance, the Āḻvār's misgivings also stand cleared up, a clarity induced by the Lord Himself.

If our ancient preceptors referred to IX-9, as ' Evening brawl ', they did label this decad, as ' Morning squabble '.

vēy maru tōḷ-iṇai meliyum, ālō!
melivum, eṉ taṉimaiyum, yātum nōkkāk
kāmaru kuyilkaḷum kūvum, ālō!
kaṇa mayil-avai kalantu ālum, ālō!
ā maruvu iṇa nirai mēykka nī pōkku
oru pakal āyiram ūḻi, ālō!
tāmaraik kaṇkaḷkoṇṭu īrti, ālō!
takavilai takavilaiyē nī kaṇṇā! (X-3-1)

Translation

Alas! my bamboo-like arms have thinned down,
Lean and lonely am I but You take no note of it ;
The pretty koels coo and the peacocks strut about,
If you'd the cattle follow for grazing and remain
Away from us a whole day, it looks a thousand aeons,
Your lotus eyes do our minds attract and oppress,
Surely, Oh, Kaṇṇā, You shed not your grace on us.

Note

The Koels coo the love-songs and the peacocks are seen strutting about; Kṛṣṇa is still in bed, but He is sure to leave shortly for the grazing fields, along with the cattle, and the prospect of separation from Him, a little hence, is so dreadful that the Gopis have already begun to feel the pangs of separation, as if Kṛṣṇa has already left. It is a terrific

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gloom that has descended on the Gopis; the arms, that would gladly embrace the Lord, have already lost their vitality and thinned down. They cannot brook separation from Him, even for a trice, which looms like a whole Yuga, in their eyes c.f. 'thṛḍi yugāyate tvāmapaśyathāṃ' (Gopikā Gita). Well, Kṛṣṇa tells them that He is very much by their side and yet, they fancy that He has already left and, after all, He will be back home in the evening. But the day is too long a wait and it looks drawn out, as far as ages. The Lord is by-no-means insensitive to the exuberance of love of His girl-companions, and, overawed by the enormity of their love for Him, He casts His bewitching looks at them, which again torment them in the present context. No wonder then, that, in their present irreconcilable mood, the love-intoxicated damsels dub Kṛṣṇa, as one totally devoid of grace.

takavilai takavilaiyē nī kaṇṇā!
taṭa mulai puṇartoṟum, puṇarccikku ārac
cukaveḷḷam vicumpu iṟantu,aṟivai mūḷkkac
cūḻntu, atu kaṇavu eṇa niṅki, āṅkē
aka uyir akam-akamtōṟum uḷ pukku,
āviyiṉ param alla vēṭkai, antō!
mika mika iṉi uṇṇaip pirivaiāmāl,
viva, niṉ pacu nirai mēykkap pōkkē. (X–3–2)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇa, indeed You are devoid of grace;
When my breasts are locked in Your sweet embrace,
Every moment is a spate of bliss which soars
Much beyond the skies and my sense it blurs;
But then it passes like a dream and does my desire induce,
Which thro' the vital pores of my life does pierce
And far exceeds the potential of my soul, alas!
Lest you should from us be apart, every now and then,
Desist You should from grazing the cows, please listen.

Notes

(i) Just to placate the love-intoxicated Gopis, Śrī Kṛṣṇa repeatedly embraced them. Pleasurable in the extreme

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though, it only aggravated their misery, as they were tormented by the almost immediate prospect of separation from Him. It is this grief that is voiced forth now.

(ii) Finding that attempts, made by Him to pacify the Gopīs, have only intensified their grief, He asks them what exactly they want Him to do. Pat comes the request from them that He should no more follow the cattle to the grazing meadows and leave them alone.

vīvaṉ, niṉ pacu-nirai mēykkap pōkku;
vevvuyir koṇṭu eṉatu āvi vēmāl;
yāvarum tuṇai illai; yāṉ iruntu uṉ
añcaṉa mēṉiyai āṭṭam kāṇēṉ;
pōvatu aṉṟu oru pakal, ni akaṉṟāl;
poru kayal kaṇ-iṇai nīrum nillā;
cāvatu-iv āykkulattu āycciyōmāyp
piṟanta it toḻuttaiyōm taṉimai-tāṉē. (X-3-3)

Translation

When into the fields the cattle You follow, my life shall be gone,
The hot sigh of grief burns out my Soul,
Companion have I none but I keep lingering still,
I see not the movement of Your form of collyrium complexion,
When you are away, the day looks like ages drawn,
Tears swell up my eyes, may these lowly ones,
Born as shepherdesses in this clan,
Be rid of the pangs of separation!

Notes

(i) *Kṛṣṇa*: "You, girls, want me to stay at home all the time, but how can I do so, without discharging my duty, as a shepherd, namely, tending the cattle?"

Gopī: "Could you, in the discharge of your so-called duty, kill us? Killing women is even more heinous than slaying men. Separation from you means certain death for us and perhaps, You, who slew Thāṭakā and Pūthanā, do not mind killing us, as well. You would

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surely realise our plight if you did but once behold your exquisite form, standing in front of a mirror".

(ii) "*Companion have I none*": "Our unique guide, friend and companion that you are, You do not oblige us with your company; my mates are withering away like me while the Koels and peacocks are out to kill me."

(iii) "*I keep lingering still*": When the Lord is away, the Gopī just lingers behind, worn-out and emaciated. It was Lord Kṛṣṇa's presence, by his side, that crowned Arjuna with fame and victory. But after the Lord went back to the Celestium, poor Arjuna, the famous archer, who was known to wield Gāṇḍiva, the bow, with great ease and success, could not even lift it and fared miserably in an encounter with some robbers. The ambidexter, that he was before, he has now lost the power of his arm with Lord Kṛṣṇa no more by his side.

(iv) "*Let us be rid of the pangs of Separation*": The Gopīs display the same ingenuity as Sāvitri did. When asked by Yama to demand anything except handing back Satyavān to her, Sāvitri outwitted Yama by making him grant her the boon of begetting a hundred sons through Satyavān, regaining her husband, Satyavān, in the process. Even so, the Gopī tells Kṛṣṇa: "It is up to you to graze the cows or stay at home. I don't want to impose any condition and all that I want is that we, damsels, born in this clan of Yours, should be rid of separation from You".

Toḷuttaiyōm taṉimaiyum, tuṇai pirintār
tuyaramum niṉaikilai, kōvintā! niṉ
toḷuttaṉil pacukkaḷaiyē virumpi,
tuṟantu emmai iṭṭu, avai mēykkap pōti;
paḷutta nal amutiṉ iṉ cāṟṟu veḷḷam
pāviyēṉ maṉam-akamtōṟum uḷpukku
aḷutta, niṉ ceṅkaṉi vāyiṉ kaḷvap
paṇimoḷi niṉaitoṟum, āvi vēmāl. (X-3-4

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Translation

Oh, Kōvintā, You think not of the loneliness of we, lowly ones
And the pangs we suffer when you from us depart ;
Tend you do the cows in Your yard and us You desert,
From Your lips, like unto a red fruit, words do run,
Sweet like nectar, pure and seasoned, and go deep down
This sinner's heart; alas! these are but hollow,
Whenever we think of it, our spirits are bathed in sorrow.

Note

Lord Kṛṣṇa tried to disabuse the Gopis, by saying: "My darlings, is there such a thing as my departing from Your midst and even if I am away, for a while, can I forget You, for a moment? I am very much alive to your overwhelming love for me and if at all I take the cows out to the pastures, it is because I am duty bound to do the work assigned to me, by my parents. But be sure, it is only my body that is away from you, while my spirit always abides in you". Sweet-sounding though, the girls take these words with but a pinch of salt. They do not assess Kṛṣṇa's assertions and assurance at their face value. Apprehending that it is mere eye-wash, they feel terribly agitated.

paṇimoḻi niṉaitoṟum, āvi vēmāl-
pakal nirai mēykkiya pōya kaṇṇā!
piṇi aviḻ mallikai vāṭai tūva,
peru mata mālaiyum vantiṉṟu, ālō!
maṇi miku mārpiṉil muḻaippōtu eṉ
vaṉa mulai kamaḻvittu, uṉ vāy amutamtantu,
aṇi miku tāmaraik kaiyai, antō!-
aṭiccīyōm talaimicai nī aṇiyāy! (X-3-5)

Translation

Your soothing words put our hearts in jitters
As we recollect them. Oh, Kaṇṇā, You did the cows go after
The whole day; the evening has arrived with gusto great
And it does the fragrance of Jasmine, in full bloom, waft,

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Let my comely breasts enjoy the lavender scent on Your winsome chest
And my lips the nectar from yours, put Your lovely lotus hand
On our lowly heads and affirm, the cows You'd no more tend.

Note

Even when Kṛṣṇa is by their side, the Gopis say that He has gone already to the grazing meadow. What is even worse, they fancy that He has been away from them for a whole day and it is evening already, with its characteristic environments. In their exuberance of love, they find what actually is the early morn, transposed into the evening with the chill breeze, laden with the fragrance of the jasmine. No wonder, they now pass through all those pangs experienced by them, in IX-9 ante. The sudden appearance of the evening breeze, cruel and tormenting, is likened to Rāvaṇa, come in the disguise of a hermit, before Sītā at Pañcavaṭi. Finding the Gopi in such a plight, Lord Kṛṣṇa asks her what exactly He should do by her and her reply is, as in the last three lines of this song. Śri Kūrattāḻvān's "Manmūrti hantha! karapallava thallajamte Kurvan Kathā Kṛtamanoratayiṣyase mām", in his "Śrivaikuṇṭa Sthava", is the exact reproduction of "put your lovely lotus hands on our lowly heads", occurring in this song.

aṭicciyōm talaimicai nī aṇiyāy-
āḻi am kaṇṇā! uṉ kōlap pātam;
piṭittu atu naṭuvu uṉakku arivaiyarum
palar; atu niṟka, em peṇmai āṟṟōm;
vaṭitaṭam kaṇ-iṇai nirum nillā;
maṉamum nillā: emakku atu-taṉṉālē,
veṭippu niṉ pacu-nirai mēykkap pōkku;
vēm, ematu uyir-aḷal meḷukil ukkē. (X-3-6)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, the lovely-eyed! put your pretty hand on our lowly heads,
May be that where You go, many a lady, dear unto you, might hold

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And massage Your lovely feet, but we, at this end, cannot contain
Our feminity and endure, tears well up like a fountain
In our eyes sharp, our minds are under tension great
And therefore even for a moment You shall not from us be apart;
Your grazing the cows can on us work havoc great,
Our spirits thaw down like unto wax on fire set.

Note

The Gopīs insist that Kṛṣṇa shall not go after the cattle but stay behind, seeing that they just can't subsist without Him. While their spirits will get burnt out like wax, set on fire, their strength of mind is next to nothing and cannot, therefore, avert the catastrophe. Whereas there may be many a girl of comely shape to attend on Him when He is away from them, He is unto the Gopis, their sole Sustainer and without Him they cannot subsist.

vēm, ematu uyir aḷ ıl meḷukil ukku-
veḷ vaḷai, mēkalai kaḷaṉṟu viḷa,
tū malark kaṇ-iṇai muttam cōra,
tuṇai mu'ai payantu eṇa tōḷkaḷ vāṭa,
mā maṇi vaṇṇā! uṉ ceṅkama'a vaṇṇa
mel malar aṭi nōva nī pōy,
ā makiḷntu ukantu, avai mēykkiṉṟu, uṇṇōṭu
acurarkaḷ t.laippeyyil, evaṉkol āṅkē? (X–3–7)

Translation

The bangles rest not on my wrists nor the saree around my waist,
Pearls of tears run down my lotus eyes and on my breasts,
The bloom is gone, my shoulders fade out, Oh, Kaṇṇā of sapphire hue!
When into the forests, tending the cows with great delight, You move,
Your delicate red lotus feet aching quite a lot,

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Apprehending the evil Kamsa's agents might on You inflict,
My spirit burns up as does the wax when on fire set.

Note

The Gopi sobs out: "Oh, Kṛṣṇa, we, on our part, suffer the pangs of separation from You, what with our thinning down terribly, losing our natural bloom and lustre and so on. But don't you see that you tread over hill and dale on bare feet, feet which are too delicate to be pressed even by our soft hands, aching a great deal? What is even worse is the route you follow, leaving it all to the whimsical cows that lead you on to fields, far and wide, thereby exposing You to Kamsa's nefarious agents who are out to destroy You. Every blade of grass, every stone, You tread upon, is Your enemy, in disguise, set on you by the scheming King Kamsa".

acurarkaḷ talaippeyyil, evaṉkol āṅku? eṉṟu
āḷum eṉ ār uyir; āṉ piṉ pōkēl;
kacikaiyum vētkaiyum uḷkalantu,
kalaviyum naliyum; eṉ kaikaḷiyēl;
vacicey uṉ tāmaraik kaṇṇum, vāyum,
kaikaḷum, pīṭaka utaiyum kāṭṭi,
ocicey nuṉ iṭai iḷa āyccīyar, ni
ukakkum nallavarotum uḷitarāyē. (X-3-8)

Translation

With fear does my dear life quiver what unto you might befall,
When You are away, tending the cattle; You'll do well
Not to go behind the cows, Oh, Kaṇṇā, better stay here,
Leave me not, lest my boundless love for You shall thro' every pore
Pierce poor me; I'd rather not mind Your flirting right here
With those other thin-waisted damsels You love whom You rope
Thro' Your lotus eyes, hands and feet and Your silken robe.

Note

Then Kṛṣṇa retorted that it was not merely a matter of His tending the cows but also His fulfilling His engagements

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with those other ladies, as the Gopis had themselves hinted at. Here then is the interesting, rather impressive reply of the Gopi. She says: " All that I want is that You should be right in our presence. As a compromise, I would not even mind Your flirting with those other ladies of your heart, right here. You don't have to go or send some one to fetch them. Your entrancing looks and Your sweet voice shall bring them unto you, your loving hands shall gather the bashful ones up and your silken robe shall obstruct those, bent down in the exhilaration of your touch and pull them upwards. Well, these constitute the messengers in question. It will suffice if you just put aside your upper garment and expose Your exquisite charm ".

ukakkum nallavaroṭum uḷitantu, uṉ-taṉ
tiruvuḷḷam iṭar keṭumtōṟum, nāṅkaḷ
viyakka iṉpuṟutum; em peṇmai āṟṟōm;
em perumāṉ! pacu mēykkap pōkēl!
mikap pala acurarkaḷ vēṇṭu uruvam koṇṭu,
niṉṟu uḷitaruvar, kaṅcaṉ ēva;
akappaṭil, avaroṭum niṉṉoṭu āṅkē
avattaṅkaḷ viḷaiyum; eṉ col kol antō! (X-3-9)

Translation

My Lord, we are not the jealous sort that shall disdain
Your making love unto others; when you do in their company revel,
Elated we too shall be; You shall, therefore, refrain
From grazing the cows, there is also the lurking evil
Of Kamsa's agents roaming about in forms unknown,
When You are with them in encounter locked, what will happen,
Alas! I can't say; do not follow the cows, unto my advice do listen.

Notes

(i) Kṛṣṇa was in no mood to swallow the Gopī's statement, in the preceding song, that she would allow Him to flirt with other ladies, right in front of her. He thought it was a mere ruse to keep him back, as it was against

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their grain to suffer gladly Kṛṣṇa making love to other ladies, and that too, in their presence. He put it straight to the Gopi that He couldn't bring Himself to believe their so-called tolerance and accept their statement, at its face value. The Gopī now avers that the pleasure, derived by beholding the bliss enjoyed by Him in the company of those other ladies, was indeed much greater than what they could have by their union with Him. If the Lord takes greater delight in mingling with those other ladies than with the Gopis, the latter would also share the Lord's delight which is paramount. In short, the Lord's delight is theirs and they have no delight of their own. It is of course a natural failing of any woman, judged by common place standards, to be terribly intolerant of her Lord sharing the connubial love with any other lady. But here, in the case of the Gopis, their God-love transcends their feminity when the latter clashes with the Lord's own delight which, it may be reiterated, is of paramount consideration. So then, here again is a clear enunciation of the highest moral value, in its crystallised form, vide also II-9, III-3 and VIII-10. These have been juxtaposed in aphorism 211 of Ācārya Hṛdayam.

(ii) Kṛṣṇa, however, insisted that He went into the forests to graze the cows, purely as a matter of religious duty and that He had no love-affair with any one on the way, as they apprehended. The Gopīs were sporting enough to accept the Lord's statement and even so, they could not but emphasise the danger to His life at the hands of Kamsa's aides, as Kamsa deployed agents all over the place, capable of assuming, at will, any form by way of eluding Kṛṣṇa, their target. The Gopīs would want Kṛṣṇa to stay back, at least on this ground.

avattaṅkaḷ viḷaiyum; eṉ col koḷ, antō!
acurarkaḷ vaṉ kaiyar, kaṅcaṉ ēva
tavattavar maṟuka niṉṟu uḷitaruvar;
taṉimaiyum peritu uṇakiṉu; irāmaṇaiyum

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uvarttalai, uṭan tirikilaiyum eṉṟu eṉṟu,
ūṭuṟa eṉṉuṭai āvi vēmāl;
tivattilum pacu- nirai mēyppu uvatti;
ceṅkaṇi vāy eṅkaḷ āyar tēvē! (X–3–10)

Translation

With lips like red fruit, Oh, gem of our shepherd clan,
Putting aside Balarāmaṉ, You move about all alone,
Many a formidable Asura, set upon by Kamsa, roams about,
Terrifying the sages, my blood boils when I think of it,
My words, alas! may You deign to listen,
I see You relish grazing cows better than Your stay in Heaven.

Notes

Kṛṣṇa to Gopīs: " Your misgivings are totally unwarranted; it is because of your overwhelming love for Me that you entertain such baseless fears. Nothing will happen to Me, be sure ".

Gopīs to Kṛṣṇa: " You are so charming, Oh, Kṛṣṇa, that we apprehend evil eyes will cast their spell on you. The Asuras, who stalk the forests, are doubly ferocious, bent upon carrying out Kamsa's sinister designs on You. Even sages are in constant dread of the evil that might befall You. It is a great pity, You choose to move alone, putting aside Your benevolent brother, Balarāmaṉ. As we think of all these, our hearts literally go up in flames ".

Kṛṣṇa to Gopīs: " How amazing is your love indeed? Why should You entertain such fears, when I am in Your midst?" So saying, He casts the bewitching spell of His smiles on them.

Gopīs to Kṛṣṇa: " You just kill us with your smiles, putting us off the track. We know your irresistible partiality for grazing the cows, an act you relish better than even staying in Heaven. Even on the Yonder side of Heaven, You will carry the pleasant memory of the pastures over here and utter in Your dream, the commands to the cows "ḍiyo, ḍiyo ".

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ceṅkaṉi vāy eṅkaḷ āyar tēvu at
tiruvaṭi tiruvaṭimēl, porunal
caṅku aṇi tuṟaivaṉ vaṇ teṉ kurukūr
vaṇ caṭakōpaṉ col āyirattuḷ
maṅkaiyar āycciyar āynta mālai
avaṉoṭum pirivataṟku iraṅki, taiyal
aṅku avaṉ pacu-nirai mēyppu oḻippāṉ,
uraittaṉa ivaiyum pattu avaṟṟiṉ cārvē. (X-3-11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand of Kurukūr Catakōpaṉ,
Reverently offered at the feet of the Chief of shepherd clan,
The Lord with red lips, fruit-like, the Gopīs' hymnal out-pourings,
The lusty pleadings of a shepherdess to keep Him back from grazing,
So that He may with her always remain,
Shall confer the same benefits as the other decads of this hymnal

Note

The Shepherdess in question acts as the mouthpiece of the Gopīs, with her remarkable capacity to plead their cause. Even as the Lord stayed with the Gopīs, in deference to their wishes, He will abide in those that chant this decad. Alternately, this decad is well-matched with the other decads of this hymnal and shall bestow the same results as those decads.

Tenth Centum—Fourth Decad (X-4)
(Cārvē tavanēri)

Preamble

In the preceding decad, the Āḻvār suffered the pangs of separation from the Lord, akin to those experienced by the Gopīs, even when the Lord was in their midst. Just as the Gopīs were placated by Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Āḻvār was pacified by the Lord and his fears were quelled when the Lord assured him

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that He would no longer get parted from him. Rid of the fear of prolongation of his bondage, the Āḻvār is now jubilant over the near prospect of his ascent to the Lord's feet in Heaven. He, therefore, gets busy in giving the finishing touches, appropriate to this grand hymnal of unparalleled sweetness and grandeur. He has begun to realise the fruits of the devotion (Bhakti), preached by him to others, right from I-2 and onwards. It may be recalled that Rāvaṇa turned a deaf ear to Vibhīṣaṇa's pious entreaty and advice but it only intensified the latter's devotion which led him on to Rāma's camp itself. This decad sets out how God is attainable through love.

cārvē ṭavaneṟikkut tāmōtaraṉ tāḷkaḷ;
kār mēka vaṇṇaṉ, kamala nayaṇattaṉ,
nīr, vāṉam, maṉ eri, kāl āy niṉra nēmiyāṉ,
pēr vāṉavarkaḷ pitaṟṟum perumaiyaṉē. (X-4-1)

Translation

Unto those that tread the loving path of devotion,
Facile indeed are the lovely feet of cloud-hued Tāmōtaraṉ
Of red lotus eyes, who does as the five elements stand,
Who sports the discus, whose glory grand,
The pre-eminent ones in Heaven for ever chant.

Note

The Āḻvār affirms that the lovely feet of Tāmōtaraṉ (Dāmodara, that is, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who displays His simplicity galore, exhibiting, on His tummy, the scar caused by ther ope tied round it by Mother Yaśodhā) render the pursuit of the path of loving surrender, quite facile—see also I-3-5, where the Āḻvār exhorted the worldlings to stick to the path of loving surrender, imbibing the quintessence of the Lord's own teachings, in His "Song Celestial". When we talk of the Lord having been tied by a rope round the tummy, during His Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa, the cow-herd boy, our bondage of Saṃsāra goes off. There is a happy blending of supremacy and simplicity in the Lord and He is, therefore, easily worshippable. The Āḻvār sets out, in this song, the Lord's great qualities of head and heart as

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well as His exquisite charm. The Lord pervades all things and beings and not merely the five elements of fire, air, water, space and earth, as such.

perumaiyaṉē, vāṉattu imaiyōrkkum; kāṇṭaṟku
arumaiyaṉē, ākattu aṉaiyārkku; eṉṟum
tiru mey uṟaikiṉṟa ceṅkaṇ māl, nāḷum
irumai-viṉai kaṭintu, iṅku eṉṉai āḷkiṉṟāṉē. (X-4-2)

Translation

Of grandeur great that does surpass the Celestials
In the upper worlds, the Lord is hardly visible
To those that do not in His heart lovingly inhere;
The lotus-eyed Lord, Who holds Tiru, for ever,
On His person, has the fruits wiped out, right here,
Of my acts, good and bad, and on top of that
Enlisted me in His service, day in and day out.

Notes

(i) The felicity, conferred by the Lord's lovely feet on those pursuing the path of loving devotion, was pointed out, in general, in the preceding song. From this song and onwards, the Āḻvār sets out the benefits accrued to him, personally. The Lord has bestowed on the Āḻvār, right here, the felicity of divine service, that is usually attainable in Heaven alone.

(ii) "*Inaccessible to those who do not inhere in His heart*"

The Lord is inaccessible to those who do not bear any love for Him and are, therefore, not eager to envision Him and commune with Him. As a matter of fact, it is only to those on whom His spontaneous grace alights (Paragata svīkāra), that He becomes accessible.

āḷkiṉṟāṉ āḻiyāṉ; ārāl kuṟaivu uṭaiyam?
miḷkiṉṟatu illai; piṟavit tuyar kaṭintōm;
vāḷ keṇṭai oṉ kaṇ maṭap piṉṉai-taṉ kēḷvaṉ
tāḷ kaṇṭakoṇṭu, ōṉ talaimēl puṉaintēṉē. (X-4-3)

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Translation

The Lord, Who the discus wields, did us liberate
From the miseries of birth, once for all; there's none else
Whose help we need, my head I do decorate
With the lovely feet of the bright, fish-eyed Piṉṉai's Spouse.

Note

The Āḷvār's mind is now absolutely clear about the immediate prospect of his ascent to Heaven and so sanguine is he that he asserts that his age-long misery of birth and rebirth is gone and that there is no question of his getting caught up in the dreadful cycle, any more. Even so, a little later, that is, X-10-2, he pleads vehemently with the Lord for the quick consummation of their deeply-longed-for union and even goes to the extent of binding Him and His Consort (Mahā Lakṣmī) on oath, for the accomplishment of the goal in question. Questioned by the Lord Himself, in that context, regarding the propriety of the Āḷvār binding Him and the Divine Mother on oath, the Āḷvār is quick to justify his conduct because of the exuberance of his God-love and his impatience to get at Him.

talaimēl puṉaintēṉ caraṇaṅkaḷ, ālin
ilaimēl tuyiṉṟāṉ, imaiyōr vaṇaṅka
malaimēl tāṉ niṉṟu, eṉ maṉattuḷ iruntāṉai,
nilai pēṟkkal ākāmai niccittu iruntēṉē. (X-4-4)

Translation

Adorned have I my head with the feet of the Lord,
Who did on a fig-leaf repose, Who is by Celestials adored,
Right here, in Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, where He just stands,
For Him to secure a berth in my mind,
Where I am sure He now remains firmly enshrined.

Notes

(i) the Āḷvār recounts the manner in which the Lord contrived to get Himself lodged firmly in his heart and how complacent He feels after reaching His coveted destination. The Lord, Who reposed on a tender fig-leaf over the

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vast expanse of water, stepped on to Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the spring-board from which He jumped into the Āḻvār's heart. When He sustained all the worlds with their contents inside His stomach, resting on the fig-leaf, He was all alone and nobody knew the manner and extent of His benefaction. And so, He hit upon a plan by which He could demonstrate to all the worlds, His great benevolence and omnipotence, amazing simplicity and easy accessibility It was in pursuance of this plan that He repaired to Mount Tiruvēṅkatam, along with the Nitya Sūrīs, the Eternal heroes in Heaven. Once this was accomplished, He moved into the Āḻvār's heart-region and established Himself firmly therein, the ultimate destination of His long travail. Here then is the beautifully phased programme of the Lord's journey to the Āḻvār's heart-centre, which would have just given way under excessive joy, had the Lord stepped on to it straightway.

As a matter of fact, the Lord's attachment to the Gnostic's (Jñāni's) physical form even surpasses His love for the pilgrim centres where He has condescended to shed His grace on His votaries. in 'Arca' (worshippable, iconic Form). This is quite understandable, seeing that the very purpose of His manifestation in ' Arca ' Form is only to get hold of His subjects, by some means or the other. And when He gets His catch all right and it is a big haul at that, as in the case of the Āḻvār, His gratification knows no bounds. The Lord's stay in the pilgrim centres is, therefore, not an end in itself but only a means for the reclamation of His subjects, His ultimate destination being the heart-centre of the spiritually regenerated subjects. Once the destination is reached, the means employed for reaching it get relegated to a position of secondary importance. It is then the turn of a devotee like Pēyāḻvār to request the Lord not to relax His interest in the pilgrim centres, which operate as the spring-board whence the Lord could reach His devotees, His ultimate destination. It is now a case of the Lord loving the pilgrim centres, firstly, as places adored by His devotees and secondly,

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out of gratitude to those centres for helping Him to reclaim His subjects, by turning them God-ward.

(ii) It is with such a deep yearning that the Lord is firmly ensconced in the heart-centre of the Saint. There is no question of His getting out on His own. Of course, the Āḻvār, endowed with a mind soaked in God-love, will do nothing to unsettle the Lord from His coveted position inside his heart and dislodge Him.

niccittu iruntēṉ eṉ neñcam kaḻiyāmai;
kaic cakkarattu aṇṇal kaḻvam peritu uṭaiyaṉ;
meccappaṭāṉ piṟarkku; meypōlum poy vallaṉ;
naccappaṭum namakku-nākattu aṇaiyāṉē. (X–4–5)

Translation

Sanguine am I that the Lord stays firm in my heart,
My Sire, holding the discus, has many a secret plan I know not,
Disclose He shan't to the impious His qualities great,
True unto the devout, He shall the otherwise delude,
He is our goal indeed, the One lying on serpent-bed.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is jubilant that the Lord, Who did all that austere penance for getting at him, namely, lying on the bosom of the waters and standing on the hill-top, is now firmly entrenched in his heart. And what more? There is still so much that the Lord is intending to do for him, which he will get to know, only in due course.

(ii) Whereas the Lord is incessantly pouring unto His devotees, in super-abundance, marvellous communications of His divine nature and the devotees shall, all the time, discover something new, He shall conceal His great qualities of head and heart, so far as the ungodly, impious persons are concerned. While the Saint sings His glory in such a prolific manner, the deluded duds and the ungodly persons hardly possess the necessary equipment for meditating on Him or singing His glory. Though looking impartial and inclined to extend the

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same treatment to Arjuna and Duryodhana alike, Lord Kṛṣṇa did, in the final analysis, punish the wicked Duryodhana and reward the righteous Arjuna.

(iii) If the Lord rests on Ādiśeṣa, a fellow-devotee of ours and is so intimate with him, it only inspires in us hopes of the possibility of His being intimate with us, as well.

nākattu aṇaiyāṇai, nāḷtōṟum ñāṇattāl
ākattu aṇaipparkku aruḷceyyum ammāṇai,
mākattu iḷa matiyam cērum caṭaiyāṇaip
pākattu vaittāṉ-taṉ pātam paṇintēṉē. (X-4-6)

Translation

Blest am I to adore the feet of the Lord,
Who keeps, on one side of His body, him that sports
On matted locks the crescent Moon, the Sire great,
Who sheds for ever His grace on those
Whose knowledge blooms into love that does embrace,
In their hearts, Him that does on serpent-bed repose.

Notes

(i) What is emphasised here by the Āḻvār is the need for transforming one's knowledge of God into love for Him. Knowledge of God is wisdom's root while love of God is its ripest fruit. In His Song Celestial also, Lord Kṛṣṇa insists on loving meditation. Of-course, He sedulously nurtures the God-love of the devotees to the point of fruition. It would be futile to expect our wandering minds to get fixed on the Lord, all the time, unless His grace alights on us at His sweet volition.

(ii) The tender solicitude of the Lord is indicated here, by pointing out how He has assigned a part of His body to Śiva, who is donning the crescent Moon on matted locks.

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paṇi neñcē! nāḻum parama paramparaṉai;
piṉiooṟum cārā; piṟavi keṭuttu āḻum-
maṇi niṉṟa cōti, matucūtaṉ, eṉ ammāṉ,
aṇi niṉṟa cempoṉ aṭal āḻiyāṉē. (X-4-7)

Translation

Of splendour great like sapphire is Matucūtaṉ, my Sire,
The One that wields the discus, flamboyant like gold;
The Lord Supreme, Who the miseries of birth dispelled,
And made me His vassal, Worship, my mind, for ever;
That dreadful disease [of Samsāra] shall afflict us, no more.

Note

The Āḻvār exhorts his God-bent mind to worship for ever the Supreme Lord of exquisite charm, the great Deliverer. The Sovereign Lord will cut out all our miseries, right at the source, namely, the cycle of birth and rebirth, where one gets caught up in the whirlpool of Samsāra, a self-perpetuating dreadful disease. Reference to the Lord, as 'Madhusūdha', is significant; even as He destroyed the demons, called Madhu and Kaiṭaba, He will cut out all the impediments standing in the way of our serving Him, of exquisite charm. Blessed indeed are those that behold the Lord, holding the dazzling discus, and drink deep that nectarean charm.

āḻiyāṉ, āḻi amararkkum appāḷāṉ,
ūḻiyāṉ, ūḻi paṭaittāṉ, nirai mēyttāṉ,
pāḻi am tōḷāl varai eṭuttāṉ pātaṅkaḷ—
vāḻī eṉ neñcē! maṟavātu vāḻkaṇṭāy. (X-4-8)

Translation

Inaccessible is my Lord, Who holds the discus on,
Even to the exalted Celestials; He stayed all alone
During the deluge great, Time and all else He did ordain,
Cows He did tend and save by lifting mount (Govardhan)
On His shoulder, fit and fine; may you, my mind, prosper,

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Adoring without fail His lovely feet for ever,
Let me hail indeed this state of affairs.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's mind having responded well to his exhortation, in the preceding song, he now pats on its back and calls upon it to adore the Lord's feet without intermission. After all the exertion put forth for achieving the end in view, it is usual for people to relax and rest on their oars, once the destination is reached. It is precisely this common failing that the Āḻvār wants his mind to guard against. He advises it to persevere in its adoration of the Lord's lovely feet, with no break whatever

(ii) He, who created myriads of things, incarnated as Kṛṣṇa in the shepherd clan, palmed off as Nanda's son, as if He too was created like others. His tending the cows has indeed a special significance. Unable to tend themselves, the cows, as a class, would not resist the Lord's aid and strike a divergent path, as we folks do. Verily, this is the essence of ' Prapatti ' or surrender to the Lord's grace—" Bhagavad pravṛtti virodhi svapravṛtti nivṛtti-prapatti ".

kaṇṭēṉ kamala malarp pātam; kāṇṭalumē,
viṇṭē oḻinta viṉaiyāyiṉa ellām:
toṇṭē ceytu, eṉṟum toḻutu vaḻiyoḻuka,
paṇṭē paramaṉ paṇitta paṇivakaiyē. (X-4-9)

Translation

Beheld have I the Lord's lotus feet and the moment I saw them,
Root and branch have all my sins been cut out and unto Him
Deep love in me has been engendered; Him I do adore
With no break, true to His dictates, as of old.

Note

The Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges the Lord's spontaneous grace, which enabled him to behold His lotus feet which are not accessible even to the exalted Celestials in the

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upper regions, despite rigorous penance for ages. The moment he saw the Lord's lovely feet, all his accumulated sins of ages got blotted out, *in toto*, true to His promise, " Ahaṃ tvā sarva pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi "(Bhagavad Gita XVIII—66). Although Lord Kṛṣṇa had said, in His 'Song Celestial', no more than this, the Āḻvār, endowed by the Lord himself with spiritual knowledge, full and complete, elucidates the full import of the Lord's promise in question. He says that the word " Mokṣayiṣyāmi " does not mean mere emancipation from bondage, the dreadful cycle of birth and rebirth, but eternal service unto the Lord, as well, in keeping with the subject's essential nature, as the Lord's exclusive vassal.

vakaiyāl maṇam oṉṟi, mātavaṉai nāḷum,
pukaiyāl, viḷakkāl, putu malarāl, nīrāl,
ticaitōṟu amararkaḷ ceṉṟu, iṟaiñca niṉṟa
takaiyāṉ caraṇam tamarkaṭku ōr paṟṟē. (X-4-10)

Translation

There's no haven, so safe and sound, unto the devout,
As the lovely feet of Mātavaṉ, our Sire, sought out
And worshipped by the Celestials, stationed all over,
Who, with a mind duly fixed on Him, offer, ever and anon,
Choice flowers, water, lamp and burn incense fine.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār concludes this decad by empahsising that the Lord is the one and only Giver, the sole Means for all votaries, irrespective of whether they seek Him out for personal ends or employ other means to attain Him or submit themselves to His loving grace.

(ii) Mādhava holds on His winsome chest His coveted Bride, the Divine Mother, the great intercessor between Man and God. Although the 'Carama Śloka' (Bhagavad Gita XVIII-66) does not contain any direct reference to the Lord's conjunction with Mahā Lakṣmī, the Divine Mother, the Āḻvār would appear to have understood the word 'Ahaṃ', occurring in the second half of

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the Śloka, to refer to the Lord, in conjunction with Mahā Lakṣmī. Actually, of the three esoteric texts, 'Tirumantra', 'Dvaya' and 'Carama Śloka', the middle one alone contains a specific reference to this holy combination of the Lod and Mahālakṣmi. It should, however, be noted that 'Carama Śloka' is only an elaboration of 'Dvaya', which again elaborates 'Tirumantra'.

paṟṟu eṉṟu paṟṟi, parama paramparaṇai
mal tiṇ tōḷ mālai vaḷuti vaḷanāṭaṉ
col-toṭai antāti ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattum
kaṟṟārkku ōr paṟṟākum kaṇṇaṉ kaḷal-iṇaiyē. (X-4-11)

Translation

Unto those that learn these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Vaḷutivaḷanāṭaṉ,
Who stuck fast, as his haven safe,
To the Supreme Lord with sinewy shoulders, shall be vouchsafed
Kaṇṇaṉ's lovely pair of feet, their destined goal.

* Caṭakōpaṉ

Note

The chanters of this decad shall easily attain the lovely pair of feet of the Supreme Lord, whose omnipotence helps to vanquish all the enemies, the impediments that stand in the way of His ardent devotees attaining Him.

Tenth Centum—Fifth Decad (X-5)
(Kaṇṇaṉ Kaḷal-iṇai)

It was out of deep compassion of unique dimensions that Saint Nammāḷvār did, in the midst of his mystic experience, *par excellence*, turn his attention on the people around, from time to time, in order to turn them God-ward. No doubt, he found them distressingly unresponsive and at one stage (*vide* stanza 25

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of "Periya Tiruvantāti", the third of Nammāḷvār's four hymnals), he observed that it would be next to impossible to wean away the worldlings, the incorrigibles and make them God-bent. And yet, so great was his tender solicitude that he went on exhorting them to realise the utter futility of worldly possessions and sensual pleasures and take refuge at the lovely feet of the Supreme Lord, Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, the surest and the easiest way of securing release from the bondage of ' Samsāra '. We could see this great gesture of the Āḷvār, in every centum of this grand hymnal, from I-2 onwards. This is, however, the last decad in which he tenders advice to the world around and a little hence, we will see him marching to heaven through the exalted and exhilarating route, known as the ' Arcirādhi mārga ', the route of great distinction, earmarked for the released souls, heaven-bound. It is characteristic of the magnanimous elders of great eminence to say a few golden words, on the eve of their exit from this world, by way of parting advice to the near and dear ones around. The Āḷvār, who is overwhelmingly conscious of the Lord's eagerness to lift him up to His Heavenly abode and the almost immediate prospect of his ascent to Heaven, tenders such parting advice in this decad, the very last of the series of lectures, delivered by him, for the edification and elevation of the earth-bound, sense-buried men of the world. c.f. Vibhīṣaṇa's advice to Rāvaṇa, even while leaving Laṅkā, bound for Lord Rāma's Camp—" na naśyantham upekṣeyam pradiptam śaraṇam yadhā " (Vālmīki Rāmāyana, VI-16-22).

The advice conveyed, in this swan-song of the Āḷvār, is short and sweet, the quintessence of ' Tirumantra ' and ' Dvaya ', calling upon the worldly men to chant Lord Nārāyaṇa's holy name and serve Him, in conjunction with Mahālakṣmī, the Divine Mother, by word (singing), deed (offering choice flowers) and thought (loving meditation), vide aphorism 228 of Ācārya Hṛdayam).

kaṇṇaṉ kaḻal-iṇai naṇṇum [illegible]m uṭaiyīr!
eṇṇum tirunāmam tiṇṇam [illegible]aṉ mē. (X-5-1)

Translation

Nāraṇam is the holy name You have to meditate upon;
Besides this, let me affirm, there's none to reckon,

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Take note, Ye, men, yearning for the lovely pair of feet
Of Kaṇṇaṉ, our Lord, [Who is easily accessible to the devout].

Note

In I-2-10, the Āḻvār taught his fellow-beings how to pray, by giving out the substance of the eight-syllabled 'Tirumantra'. The Subject of this 'Mantra' is none other than the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa (used, in short form, as Nāraṇam), the abode of countless souls, of vast excellence and an inexhaustible fountain of bliss. That Nārāyaṇa is the sole Refuge unto those who are desirous of attaining Him, is now re-iterated by the Āḻvār in his valedictory address to the world, at large No other qualification is needed than the yearning to attain the Lord's lovely pair of feet, for chanting this holy name of His, the great Mantra. As a matter of fact, even the highest degree of attainments, one can have with the utmost exertion, will by-no-means be commensurate with the end in view, namely, enjoyment of heavenly bliss in that Eternal Land whence there is no returning. So then, the only qualification, if at all, is the earnest desire, on the part of the votary, to achieve this highest goal and the one, thus qualified, becomes eligible to chant the holy name, Nārāyaṇa, which delivers the goods, all right. Even so, the Lord is referred to, as Kṛṣṇa in this song, so as to attract the subjects by virtue of His amazing simplicity, instead of scaring them away by emphasising His Supremacy and Sovereignty over the entire universe, His overlordship.

nāraṇaṉ, emmāṉ, pār aṇaṅku āḻaṉ—
vāraṇam tolaitta kāraṇaṉ-tāṉē. (X-5-2)

Translation

Nāraṇaṉ, Our Sire, is Mother Earth's loving Spouse,
The One Who did ordain this vast Universe,
Who destroyed the gigantic elephant
Set upon Him by Kamsa, the great tyrant.

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Notes

The Āḷvār is now elaborating the meaning of the word 'Nārāyaṇa', used in a shortened form as 'Nāraṇan', in the preceding song. Mother Earth (Bhū Devī) is one of the three principal Consorts of Lord Nārāyaṇa and reference to Bhū Devī, in this song, can be taken to include the two other Consorts as well, 'Śrī' and 'Nīḷā' Devis, in the Celestial setting. "Our Sire" would denote the 'Lord's sovereignty over the 'Līlā Vibhūti', the Sportive Universe, in which we all live. That means, the Lord is depicted as the Sovereign Master of both the 'Nitya' (eternal) and 'Līlā' (sportive) Vibhūtīs (worlds).

'Tirumantra' comprises three words, namely, '*Aum*' (Praṇava) '*Namaḥ*' and 'Nārāyaṇāya'. Of the three letters, comprised in the first word, the first letter 'A' denotes the Lord Himself, the originator of the whole universe and the protector of all. 'A' is the very first of all letters and could thus symbolise the origin of the Universe, namely, the Lord and this is clearly brought out in this song. Derived, as it is, from the root 'Ava rakṣaṇe', 'A' means Protector and here again, it could appropriately denote the Lord, Who is the Protector of all. But then, when the Lord extends protection, the immediate presence of Mahālakṣmi, the Lord's Divine Consort, is absolutely necessary and, in this context, her association with the letter 'A' as a protecting force, is to be thought of. Although the Lord is surely capable of protecting His subjects, all by Himself, yet the Sāstras say that He bestows such benevolent protection in the company of His consort, Mahālakṣmi Who is grace personified. "Lakṣmyā saha Hṛṣīkeśo Devyā Kāruṇyarūpayā, rakṣakas sarva sidhānte Vedāntepi ca gīyate" etc. This is just to eliminate the possible risk of the Supreme Lord being alienated from His subjects, on account of the innumerable lapses of the latter. Therefore, the letter 'A' has to denote Lord Nārāyaṇa, in close conjunction with Mahālakṣmi. That is why this conjunction is referred to, in this song.

The twin aspects of protection, extended by the Lord to His Subjects, are removal of all undesirable things and fulfilment

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of aspirations, as applied to individuals. The slaying of the formidable elephant, Kuvalayāpīṭam, referred to in this song, indicates how the Lord removes the evils, the impediments.

tāṉē ulaku ellām, tāṉē paṭaittu, iṭantu,
tāṉē uṇṭu, umiḻntu, tāṉē āḷvāṉē. (X-5-3)

Translation

'Tis He (Nārāyaṇa), Who does the whole universe pervade,
Who did create it all with no external aid,
Who did in His stomach sustain all the worlds
And then spat them out; 'tis He who did once again
Lift the Earth from deep waters, everything He does ordain.

Note

The meaning of the word, 'Nārāyaṇa', is expounded further, particularly, the role of the Lord, as the Protector of one and all. The entire universe constitues His very body and as such, He is bound to sustain His body. He is the sole Architect of the Universe, combining in Himself the triple causes of creation, the *Material*, the *Operative* and the *Instrumental* causes. Creation of the Universe, dowering myriads of souls with the appropriate bodies, the vehicles of expression or the media of evolution, is by itself the Lord's act of grace galore. On the top of that, He sustains all the worlds, with their massive contents of things and beings, inside His stomach during the deluge and thus saves them all from being swept off and dismembered by the whirling waters of terrific depth and width. And then, He spits them back into their erstwhile positions, quite *in tact*. The several facets of the Lord's universal protection are thus indicated.

āḷvāṉ,āḻi nīrk kōḷvāy aravu-aṇaiyāṉ
tāḷvāy malar iṭṭu, nāḷvāy nāṭīrē. (X-5-4)

Translation

Reclining on the serpent, strong and smart,
The Lord holds sway over the Universe vast;

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Him may You adore, all the time,
Placing at His lovely feet flowers fine.

Notes

'Āya', the dative ending of the last word of Tirumantra, that is, 'Nārāyaṇāya' reveals the deep urge of the subject to render service unto the Lord in every conceivable manner, like that of 'Ādiśesa' (first servant), rather the factotum who serves the Lord in a number of ways, as umbrella, throne, footwear, bed etc., etc. Therefore it is, that the Āḻvār calls upon the worldlings to render service unto the Lord, in keeping with the above elucidation of the meaning of the word 'Nārāyaṇāya'.

The Lord reclines on Ādiśeṣa, in the Milk ocean, the seat of His creative activity, well within the ear-shot of the appeal of ardent devotees, so as to fulfil His role, as the Universal Protector. He is also easily worshippable, with whatever flowers the votary can get hold of.

nāṭīr, nāḷtōṟum vāṭā malarkoṇṭu;
pāṭīr, avaṉ nāmam, vīṭē peṟalāmē. (X-5-5)

Translation

Attain you shall emancipation
If you worship the Lord daily
With fresh flowers and sing gaily
His holy names, set to nice tunes.

Note

When one renders service unto the Lord, in keeping with one's essential nature, as the exclusive vassal of the Lord, solely dependent on Him, one is sure to attain Heaven, the final emancipation from the terrific cycle of birth and death and eternal service unto the Lord in Heaven, in close proximity. The worship of the Lord has to go on, all the time, even as one satiates one's hunger by taking food with regular frequency. It is not mere spelling out the Lord's names that the Āḻvār speaks of here but singing the names tunefully.

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mēyāṉ vēṅkaṭam–kāyāmalar vaṇṇaṉ,
pēyār mulai uṇta vāyāṉ, mātavaṉē.

Translation

Mātavaṉ, of the lovely complexion of lily fl
Who did the devil's (Pūthanā's) breasts gath
And suck them out to death, is the one
Who in (Mount) Vēṅkaṭam stays on.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḷvār had asked the men around, to seek out the Supreme Lord and worship Him daily with flowers and sing His glorious names And now, he tells them that the Lord is not that cold, icy abstract thing, formless and invisible, as some would say, but is easily accessible, atop Mount Tiruvēṅkatam, exhibiting His resplendent Form of exquisite charm. As already elucidated by the Āḷvār in X-4-4, the Lord takes up position in pilgrim centres like Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, only to step on to the heart-region of His devotees. The Lord enthrals the votaries through His (worshippable) Iconic Form of extraordinary charm. As Nampiḷḷai puts it, *even a tiny twig will come under the magic spell of this charm and cannot resist the urge to serve Him*, an urge, deep and irresistible and a mere twig though, it just cannot exist without serving Him. What is even more attractive is the wholesome conjunction of the Lord with the Divine Mother, as Mādhava, bearing Māhalakṣmi on His winsome chest, a highly profitable combination from the point of view of emancipation of the errant supplicants, with countless transgressions.

mātavaṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu, ōta vallīrēl,
tīttu oṉṟum aṭaiyā-ētam cārāvē. (X-5-7)

Translation

Past sins shall not affect you at all
Nor shall sins taint you, in future, as well,
If that name, 'Mātavaṉ' you'd but spell

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Notes

(i) Remarkable indeed is the magnitude of the Āḻvār's compassion for the fellow-beings. Here is the Āḻvār's recipe for those who are unable to seek out the Lord, in His worshippable image Form, and worship Him daily with choice flowers either at Tiruvēṅkaṭam or any other pilgrim centre. It will suffice if they chant 'Dvaya', the gem of a mantra, a couplet, the first part of which enjoins that the individual soul should seek refuge at the lotus feet of the Lord through the mediation of Mahālakṣmī while the second stipulates that service unto them both, in a state of conjunction, should be prayed for. Again, spelling the name, 'Mādhava', denoting this holy combination, need not be of one's own longing to pronounce it; it would be enough if some one chanted it and these people merely followed suit.

(ii) The holy name (Tirumantra) will, by itself, confer on its chanters salvation, and 'Dvaya', the gem of a mantra, would likewise procure salvation for those who utter it. Well, in that name, 'Mādhava', there is a combination of both 'Tirumantra' and 'Dvaya', with redoubled efficicacy, keeping the votaries above all sins, past, present and future.

cārā ētaṅkaḷ-nīr ār mukil vaṇṇaṇ
pēr ār ōtuvār ārār-amararē. (X–5–8)

Translation

Those that chant the holy names of the cloud-hued Lord,
Whatever might be their descent and deeds,
Shall well be beyond the reach of evil
And be on a par with the redoubted Celestials.

Note

That there is no restriction whatsoever, conditioning one's eligibility to chant the Lord's names, is clearly brought out, in this song. Whosoever chants the holy names of the Lord, of enchanting complexion, shall not only be beyond

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the reach of evil of any kind but shall also be on a par with the exalted Celestials. The mere sight of the cloud-hued Lord is so exhilarating that it cannot but tempt the beholders to utter His holy names, over and over again. Irrespective of their parentage and occupation, those that recite the Lord's glorious names acquire a stature equal to that of the Celestials who subsist solely on divine service.

amararkku ariyāṉai, tamarkaṭku eḷiyāṉai,
amarat toḻuvārkaṭku amarā viṉaikaḷē (X-5-9)

Translation

They that are in God-love soaked and adore
The Lord Supreme, beyond the reach of even Brahmā and others,
But unto the devout easily accessible,
Are indeed out of reach of ills and evils.

Note

The Lord is, no doubt, the Great Giver, rather the one and only Giver and there is no gift beyond Him. He is known as 'Arthidhārtha paridhāna dhikṣitha'. The 'Ithihāsas' and Purāṇas contain frequent references to the Lord's benevolence unto the Devas vis-a-vis the Asuras, on whom the Lord inflicts sufferings. The Āḻvār has also alluded to this fact, quite often, in this hymnal itself. And yet, the Lord makes Himself scarce, that is, He does not reveal His glory and grandeur to the Devas, their exaltation notwithstanding, because they are only self-seekers, always wanting the Lord to cater to their selfish ends. Even Brahmā, who emerged from the lotus flower which sprouted from the Lord's navel, couldn't cash in that unique position of advantage and perceive the Lord's prowess, His greatness and grandeur, to any appreciable extent. On the other hand, the Lord is easily accessible to the devout, whose love unto Him is one of purity and virginity, with no strings attached. Love rendered to God for God's sake, culminating in benediction or glorification of God, carries with it the highest reward, namely, the possession of God Himself. This fact is brought home, in this

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viṉai val iruḷ eṉṉum, muṉaikaḷ veruvip pōm—
cuṉai nal malar iṭṭu, niṉaimiṉ neṭiyāṉē. (X–5–10)

Translation

Sins in their multitude and nescience dense,
Shall, in sheer fright, clear out,
When you on the Lord Supreme meditate
And worship Him with nice flowers, fresh from ponds.

Notes

(i) While the first song of this decad is in elucidation of 'Tirumantra' and the seventh deals with 'Dvaya', the 'Mantra Ratna' the later songs of this decad have a bearing on '*CARAMA ŚLOKA*' (Bhagavad Gita XVIII-66), wherein Lord Kṛṣṇa assured Arjuna of release from all sins (Sarva pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi).

(ii) The Āḻvār calls upon people to worship the Lord with flowers, easily procured from ponds, and even if this slight effort is not possible, they will do well to just meditate on the Lord Who keeps thinking of His subjects all the time and leads them on to exalted positions (Ahaṁ smarāmi Madbhaktaṁ nayāmi paramāṁ gathiṃ).

neṭiyāṉ aruḷ cūṭum paṭiyāṉ caṭakōpaṉ
noṭi āyirattu ip pattu aṭiyārkku aruḷpēṟē. (X–5–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Who basks in the grand sun-shine
Of the grace galore of the Lord Supreme,
Will put the chanters on a par with him.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār ends up this decad by stating that the chanters of these ten songs will be blest, like him, with the Lord's spontaneous grace, in super-abundance.

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(ii) Rāmāyaṇa, the great Ithihāsa, took birth in the grace of the four-headed Brahmā who is anything but steady, while 'Viṣṇu Purāṇa', the 'Purāṇa-Rātṇa', is the outcome of the benedictive grace of 'Pulasthya', one of the four disciples of Śivā of tāmasik temperament and habits. On the other hand, Tiruvāymoḷi flowed from the loving grace of Lord Mahā Viṣṇu, the Puruṣottama of unalloyed purity. Herein lies the overwhelming superiority of Tiruvāymoḷi over Rāmāyaṇa, the epic of top-ranking excellence and Viṣṇupurāṇa which occupies the pride of place among the Purāṇas.

(iii) The Āḷvār could himself declare that he was the recipient of the Lord's grace galore, because he was quite conscious of its great impact on him.

Tenth Centum—Sixth Decad (X-6)
(Aruḷpeṟuvār)

Preamble

As the great Nampiḷḷai would put it, in his inimitable diction, the stage has now been reached when the Lord is in hot pursuit of the Āḷvār. The position hitherto, commencing from the opening song of the Āḷvār's first hymnal (Tiruviruttam) was, however, just the reverse, that is, the Āḷvār was seeking out the Lord and pursuing Him doggedly. The Āḷvār, who was the supplicant before, is now vigorously sought after by the Lord Whose love for the great savant knows no bounds, vide the 3rd song of this decad, which highlights the speed with which the Lord wishes to take the Āḷvār, to the heavenly abode. In the exuberance of His love for the Āḷvār, the Lord would even think in terms of lifting him bodily to heaven. The Āḷvār had to plead with the Lord to give up His overambitious project and he advised Him not to defile the sanctity of Heaven by introducing therein his physical body. What is even more astounding is the Lord's extreme fascination for the Āḷvār's physical body, the last of the staggering number of bodies, tenanted by him, that led Him on to seek the Āḷvār's permission to enjoy his body, limb by limb. For this purpose, the Lord would assume a number of Forms, as He did

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during the famous '*RĀSAKRĪDA*' dance with the damsels of Vrindāvan and again, when He married sixteen thousand pretty ladies and led the life of a typical householder with each one of them, all at once, in the holy island of Dvāraka, a township raised by Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself from the bed of the Sea.

If we probed a little into the relative stance of the Āḻvār and the Lord, it can easily be discovered that the Āḻvār's yearning for the Lord dwindles down to insignificant proportions, as compared to the all-conquering love, which the Lord bears for him. Actually, this has already been succinctly brought out in IX-6-10. Well, if the Lord bore such inordinate love for the Āḻvār, defying description, and still kept him on in this abode, it was only in the larger interests of mankind, as a whole, their uplift through the Āḻvār's scintillating, soul-stirring songs. Now that this purpose has been achieved, the Lord can no longer resist the deep urge in Him to expedite the Āḻvār's uplift to Heaven. As a matter of fact, the Lord is already well on the move, having come to nearby Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, the vantage point for lifting the Āḻvār to Heaven. Of course, the Lord could as well confer on the Āḻvār, heavenly bliss, right here, but, in the very nature of things, this land of dark nescience is not the place for the Lord's uninterrupted enjoyment of the Āḻvār. Even so, He would want the Āḻvār to command Him to take him to Heaven. In other words, He wishes to confer on him heavenly bliss and beatitude, in a spirit of service unto the Āḻvār and not as a matter of grace. The Āḻvār is, however, not the one who would make any gesture of the kind which militates against his creed of complete self-abnegation, resulting from his total dependence on the Lord Whose will is paramount. Put in a nutshell, the position is like this :

Lord to Āḻvār: "Oh, Āḻvār, won't you beckon Me to take you on to the heavenly abode?"

The Āḻvār ponders within himself: "How amazing and how incredible that the Sovereign Lord seeks my permission and wants to play a subordinate role! Shall I not meet my fellow-men and talk to them about this and make them also appreciate and admire the Lord's simplicity galore and tender solicitude? But then, these fellows are hardly available to me for sharing my wonderful experience, immersed, as they are, in wordly pleasures. And how

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about the Lord? Shall I not pour out my mind to the Lord Himself, expatiating on this wonderful gesture of His? Alas! He too is heavily pre-occupied, fiercely concentrating on how best He can expedite my ascent to heaven. Let me, in the last resort, open up a dialogue with my own God-bent mind and impress upon it the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord, the immensity of the love borne by Him unto me and the resultant benefits accrued to me ".

In short, the Āḻvār had hitherto looked upon the Lord, as the sole ordainer, of unbridled independence, but now he realises that the Lord is but the abject servant of His devotees and gives vent to his hearty appreciation of the Lord's tender solicitude and amazing simplicity.

aruḷperuvār aṭiyār-tam aṭiyaṉēṟku āḻiyāṉ
aruḷtaruvāṉ amaikiṉṟāṉ; atu namatu vitivakaiyē;
iruḷ taru mā ñālattuḷ iṉip piṟavi yāṉ vēṇṭēṉ,
maruḷ oḷi nī, maṭa neñcē! vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ aṭi vaṇaṅkē. (X-6-1)

Translation

The Lord, Who does the discus wield, graciously insists
On salving me, the vassal of His devotees, who on His grace subsist;
He would want me to order Him about! I shan't desire
Birth in this land of dark nescience any more,
The feet of the Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, do adore
And yield not, Oh, fickle mind, to the thought, that allures,
Of enjoying the Supreme Lord, right from here.

Note

(i) The Āḻvār cajoles his mind to revel, along with him, in the enjoyment of the Lord's glorious trait of loving condescension, in the following terms :

" Don't you see that the Lord is all agog to confer on me the supreme bliss, and that too, at my dictation? Oh, what a trait and how glorious! There is none over here with whom I can share my jubilation over this wonderful trait of the Lord. Would you, therefore,

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come along with me to the Eternal Land (Heaven) where we can appropriately share this exulation with the exalted and enlightened denizens over there? The Lord wants to get hold of me as firmly as He wields the lovely discus. In other words, He shall give me up only if He gave up the valiant discus. Actually, He sheds on me the aggregate of the love He bears unto the discus and other exalted members of that holy band, known as Eternal Heroes (Nitya Sūrīs). Well, do you know how this has come about? Surely, I could not have been chosen as the recipient of His super-abundant love and overwhelming grace, had I invoked His grace directly instead of being the humble vassal that I am of the one that stands last in the chain of His devotees".

The last sentence of the above monologue obviously reflects the theme already set out by the Āḻvār in VIII-10 and here then is the point of time at which that bears fruit. The Āḻvār's mind was, however, quick to retort, saying " Well, You were, all the time, keenly awaiting the influx of the Lord's grace and now that it is forthcoming, You are the blessed recipient thereof, all right. What then is the special feature, you are trying to import into it now? "

And now is the turn of the Āḻvār to make the brilliant exposition, as follows :

No doubt, God Himself is eager to grant salvation to the subjects, unsolicited, as becomes His high office (Godship) and yet, He chooses to see the soul spontaneously fly to Him for embracement. This is like the bridegroom, throbbing with love for his bride, waiting, all the same, till the bride herself did make the first movement and fly to him, the pleasure thus getting enhanced on both sides. This is precisely the meaning of God waiting and the soul moving towards Him. Mysterious indeed is the way of God in the exercise of His grace, and He suffers the creatures' complacence in believing that they deserved the Lord's grace by their own acts of merit. Lakṣmaṇa, who was all agog to render

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service unto Rāma and Sītā in every conceivable manner and followed them into exile, indicated to Rāma, just before the commencement of the exile, the inordinate longing on his (Lakṣmaṇa's) part to serve the Divine Couple, in a concrete manner. He addressed Rāma thus:

" You shall with Your Videhan Spouse
Recline upon the mountain's brows ;
Be mine the toil, be mine to keep
Watch over You both, awake or asleep ".

When the three of them actually reached the forest, Lakṣmaṇa recollected that he was but Rāma's vassal and had to do his bidding; Lakṣmaṇa, therefore, petitioned to Rāma to grant the necessary permission before he (Lakṣmaṇa) would stir into action. Even then, Rāma tried to keep Himself in the background and said:

" Let a spot he chosen, pleasant and pure
Where waters gleam and trees are fair ".

This did not, however, satisfy Lakṣmaṇa, despite his pledge to render every kind of service (ahaṁ sarvaṁ Kariṣyāmi) and he prayed unto Rama, ' Kriyatāmiti mām vadha ':

" Select yourself some pleasant spot,
Be mine the care to rear the cot ".

And now, the Āḻvār tells his mind, " How amazing is this indeed! the Lord addresses me in such terms as Lakṣmaṇa did unto Rāma and wants me to command Him and take service from Him. He wants me to order Him to take me to Heaven and indicate the elaborate arrangements to be made by Him *en route*, such as setting up banners, buntings and festoons, holding over my head the parasol, to the accompaniment of music from pipes and drums, the Lord Himself leading the way, with torch in hand, proclaiming that I, His Lord, was coming behind, heralded by the holy band of chanters of Divya Prabandha and so on ".

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How the Lord hesitated to exercise His own will in the matter of taking the Āḻvār to Heaven without a specific directive from him, is succinctly brought out in Īṭu commentary which, for its sheer brilliance, deserves to be reproduced here, *in toto*. Nampiḷḷai puts it that his Master, Nañcīyar directly heard his Guru, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, elucidate the point at issue, by expatiating on Śloka 42 of Aḷavandār's 'Stotra Ratna' (hymnal gems) (Tathānujānantamudhāra vīkṣaṇaiḥ), as follows:

Senāpathi is the Archangel and premier chamberlain to God. Dressed in his stately robes, he carries the fan (the sign and privilege of royalty) and holds the baton (symbol of authority). Vast indeed is the privilege he enjoys at the hands of the Lord; unbid, he can enter the private chambers where the Lord and His Divine Consorts are in the gay abandon of their love. The Lord would not take offence at His hoary Chamberlain's sudden entry into His private chambers. On the other hand, He would even feel more delighted in his company, relegating His sport with the Divine Consorts to a secondary place. Far from being embarrassed by the sudden entry of the Minister, without prior notice or summons, the Divine Consorts just suspend their free disport and are all attention from the throne which they share with the Lord. The Minister, who is by-no-means unaware of the delicate situation, tarries not longer than absolutely needed for the transaction of the State business and puts before the Lord, in as few and select terms as possible, proposals relating to the Cosmic administration, such as the transfers and appointments of Brahmās (the Demi-urges in charge of each Cosmic egg, comprising fourteen worlds) etc. The Lord at once signifies His approval of all such proposals unquestioningly, literally signing the sanctions with sweet looks. He would say, "Sire, as you have proposed, so be it".

As Bhaṭṭārya was expounding the profound secrets of God's love unto His trusted lieutenants, as embodied

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in the śloka in question, he fell into praroxysms of joy, in the company of Kiṭāmpi-Āccāṉ (the body-guard disciple of Śrī Rāmānujācārya) and others who were present in that assembly. Āccāṉ was Bhaṭṭārya's co-student and so great indeed was their mutual affection that Iḷaiyāḷvāṉ, a disciple of Āccāṉ queried the Master as to how he happened to love and follow Bhaṭṭārya, much more than Bhaṭṭārya's own disciples did. Āccāṉ replied :

"Son, you don't seem to be aware of what took place, the other day; placing a book in Bhaṭṭārya's hands, Śrī Rāmānuja led him before Lord Raṅganātha and there, outside the Holy Bar, made him recite a Śloka; 'looking round, Śrī Rāmānuja called upon all his disciples, assembled there, to hold Bhaṭṭārya on a par with himself, and bestow on him love and regard in an equal measure."

(ii) "*I shan't desire birth in this land of darkness and nescience any more*". Thus does the Āḷvār clarify his present stand to his mind which questioned him whether, in the light of the Lord's subservient mood, he would go his own way and enjoy the Lord, right here, or yield to His wish and permit Him to lift him up to the heavenly abode. As a matter of fact, the Āḷvār's mind was quite aware of the earlier attitude of the Āḷvār and his special fascination for the several pilgrim centres in this abode, where the Lord is manifest in His worshippable iconic Form, displaying, at each such centre, a particular aspect and special attribute to be meditated upon. The Āḷvār now impresses upon his mind that, while his love for these centres remains unabated, he nevertheless dreaded this soil, because of its corrupting influence on even that exalted band of Eternal Heroes (Nitya Sūrīs), if ever they came down here. Nay, the Earth's contamination would extend even to their Chief. Well, did it spare even one of the eminence of Prahlāda? Further, although Nammāḷvār and the other Āḷvārs came into this world, at their own volition, for the redemption and uplift

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of mankind, as set forth in the Śloka " Kritātiṣu narā Rājan..... Kalau iccanthi sambhavam " of Śrī Bhāgavada, yet he would not wish to stay in this abode any more, having already rendered the service expected of him, namely, singing these hymns, thereby rendering ' Kali ' (the evil forces of the current yuga) ineffective.

True, there was a time when the Āḻvār stuck fast to centres like Tiruvāraṇviḷai and would have voted for everlasting stay there, in preference to going up to Heaven. But now, he has been completely disillusioned and will no longer like to walk on the double-edged razor that life is, in this material body made up of the five elements and in this land of dark nescience, with its endless potentialities for mischief and incalculable damage to his spiritual progress. If that were so, addressing his mind currently to adore the Lord, enshrined at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu would appear to be rather misleading but it is not so. The Lord has come to this centre only to expedite the Āḻvār's ascent to Heaven and it, therefore, behoves the Āḻvār to cooperate with the Lord and facilitate His work. Adoration of the Lord, in this particular context, would, therefore, mean that the Āḻvār should fall in line with the Lord, whose presence in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu forms part of His project of lifting the Āḻvār up to the high Heavens.

vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ aṭi vaṇaṅki, mā ñalap piṟappu aṟuppāṉ-
kēṭṭāyē maṭa neñcē! –kēcavaṉ em perumāṉaip-
pāṭṭu āya pala pāṭi, paḻaviṉaikaḷ paṟṟu aṟuttu,
nāṭṭārōṭu iyalvu oḻintu, nāraṇaṉai naṉṉiṉamē. (X-6-2)

Translation

Many indeed are the favours on us conferred;
Better take note, my docile mind, our contacts were severed
With the world around and gone are our age-long sins,
To cut our moorings with this land of dark nescience,
Thro' many a song we did land Kēcavaṉ, our Lord,

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The lovely feet of our Sire in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, we adored
And Nāraṇaṉ, Our Liege-Lord, we have attained.

Note

This song is but a continuation of the Āḻvār's dialogue with his mind, Questioned by the mind as to why the Āḻvār gloated over the grace of the Lord, as if it was something extra-ordinary, instead of looking upon it merely as the Lord's response, rather belated, to the request made by him, right from the opening song of his very first hymnal, namely, Tiruviruttam, the Āḻvār disabuses it of its wrong notions, Well, the Āḻvār had merely prayed for deliverance from this foul body, purged of all his grossness, while what actually materialised, due to the influx of the Lord's extra-ordinary grace, is, as listed in this song, namely, eradication of his age-long sins, lauding the Lord through a spate of songs, comprised in his four hymnals, severance of contacts with the worldlings and attainment of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa. The Āḻvār would want his mind to take due note of all these and acknowledge the immensity of the Lord's bounty. By exhibiting the enthralling charm of His locks of hair, the Lord attracted the Āḻvār and the latter poured out his heart unto Him through many a scintillating song. Was it not the Lord's unique grace which made the Āḻvār laud Him, instead of falling in line with his fellow-beings, in this land, rampant with rant and adulation, glorifying the frail humans, with all their dirt and devilry? The sycophants themselves are fully aware of the unworthiness of the men they adore and yet they indulge in such unpardonable white lies, all for the sake of petty gains and eking out their livelihood And what more? To the list of favours conferred on the Āḻvār has also been added his complete severance from the men around, steeped miserably in the erroneous notions of 'I-ness' and 'My-ness'. And then, the finale comes, namely, the attainment of the Eternal Friend and Relation, the Supreme Lord-Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, to the rigid and total exclusion of those parasites, the artificial, earthly relations.

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naṉṉiṉam nārāyaṇaṉai nāmaṅkaḷ pala colli;
maṉ-ulakil vaḷam mikka vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ vantu, iṉṟu
viṉ-ulakam taruvāṉāy viraikiṉṟāṉ, vitivakaiyē;
eṉṉiṉavāṟu ākā ik karumaṅkaḷ-eṉ neñcē! (X–6–3)

Translation

Nārāyaṇa, our Benefactor great, we have attained,
Chanting many a holy name of His, my friendly mind,
The benign qualities of my Lord beam forth in this land,
And stationed in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, He awaits my command
To grant me the Heaven and that too, with great speed;
Well, these deeds of His do my expectations far exceed!

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's joyous rapport with his mind continues. He is amazed at the Lord's overwhelming grace, far exceeding all his earlier expectations.

(ii) As the Āḻvār contemplated on the manifestations of the Lord, in His worshippable Form at the various pilgrim centres, he was particularly impressed by a special auspicious attribute, graciously displayed by the Lord in each centre and this was naturally meditated upon by Him. The illustrious author of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam' has indeed high-lighted this aspect. In aphorism 184 of the said work, it has been brought out that the Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu has been presented to us by Nammāḻvār, as one who subserves His devotees, even while conferring on them the heavenly bliss. Oh, what a gift and in what manner served! As Nampiḷḷai puts it, in his soul-stirring diction, it is not as if the Lord just accommodates the Āḻvār, in that Eternal Land peopled by the Celestials, and puts him as one more denizen of the exalted Heaven; the Lord simply gifts away the entire Heaven to the Āḻvār. What is more, He deems it a matter of great condescension, on the part of the Āḻvār, if he accepted the gift. The Lord's anxiety, in this context, arises from the fact that He is in no mood to just lift the Āḻvār along but He would do so only at the Āḻvār's own bidding,

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indicating the manner in which he should be conducted by the Lord and assigning Him quite a few tasks to be performed *en route*.

Well, seeing that the creature is but the Creator's great gain, the latter's anxiety to reclaim the former, seeking his willing co-operation is quite understandable. Again, in the work-a-day world, when we seek the good offices of some one for the accomplishment of a particular task, we find that his actual performance falls far short of our expectations and so, we have to do our own bit also. But that is not the case with the Lord whose bounty surpasses even our dreamy expectations.

eṉ neñcattu uḷ iruntu, iṅku irum tamiḻ nūl ivai moḻintu,
val neñcattu iraṇiyaṉai mārvu iṭanta vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ,
maṉ añca, pāratattup pāṇṭavarkkāp paṭaitoṭṭāṉ;
nal neñcē! nam perumāṉ namakku aruḷ-tāṉ ceyvāṉē.
(X-6-4)

Translation

Note, Ye, my sweet mind, the Lord, in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu enshrined,
Tore into twain Iraṇyaṉ's heart of steel and, in the war
Of Mahābhārata, took up arms for Pāṇṭavas' sake, a terror
He was unto the kings ranged opposite; firmly fixed in my mind,
These fine songs were by Him sung and heaps He on me evermore
Favours fresh, indeed an act of grace galore!

Notes

(i) The great Ordainer that the Supreme Lord is, He has been depicted in songs one and three of this decad, as the ordained, carrying out the dictates of the Āḻvār or at least wanting to do so. The present song dispels the doubt, possibly entertained by some persons as to whether the Sovereign Lord would ever descend to such depths and play a subservient role. Did not the Lord keep Himself ready all over the place, as Narasiṅga, so as to respond immediately to the call of His young devotee, Prahlāda? And then, He

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served the Pāṇṭavas in ever so many ways and did the meanest of jobs, such as running errands, driving Arjuna's chariot and so on.

(ii) The Āḻvār's mind, steeped, for ages, in sensual pleasures, was taken possession of, by the Lord, at the appropriate moment, and there He established Himself firmly lest He should be denied re-entry into the Āḻvār's mind, once He got out of it. Well, what was all this herculean effort for, on the part of the Lord? Here is the answer: It was from this vantage point that the Lord sang 'Tiruvāymoḷi', these songs, *par excellence*, chaste and elegant, syntactically perfect, setting the pace for future grammarians to emulate and enjoy. The authorship of 'Tiruvāymoḷi' is thus clearly ascribed to the Lord Himself.

(iii) Lord Kṛṣṇa controlled and conducted the military strategy of the great war of Mahābhāratha, at every turn. Once, it so happened that the horses of the Pāṇḍava army were almost dying of thirst and there was no water near at hand. The Lord, who could divine the presence of water even in rocky soil, drew forth plentiful supply of water from the bosom of the earth and retrieved what seemed to be a forlorn situation beyond remedy. Naturally, the Lord's presence on the battlefield, as a partisan of the Pāṇḍavas, ever ready to surmount difficulties of whatever magnitude, struck terror in the hearts of the kings ranged on the side of the kauravas, and they sank down, with diffidence.

vāṉ ēṟa vaḻi tanta vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ paṇivakaiyē
nāṉ ēṟap peṟukiṉṟēṉ-narakattai naku neñcē!–
tēṉ ēṟu malart tuḷavam tikaḷ pātaṉ , ceḷum paṟavai
tāṉ ēṟit tirivāṉa tāḷ-iṇai eṉ talaimēlē. (X–6–5)

Translation

I am on my heavenly ascent and the Lord enshrined
In Tiruvāṭṭaṟu is here to guide me *en route*, as of yore ordained,
Laugh down, my mind, the world that hitherto kept you bound;

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Implanted on my head are the feet, well adorned
By the honey-studded tulaci flower, of the Lord,
Who roams about on His lovely mount, the Garuḍa

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is indeed very jubilant over the immediate prospect of his ascent to Heaven through that exalted and exhilarating route, known as 'Arcirādi mārga'. He sees in the Lord at Tiruvāttāṟu, his keen escort, on his Heaven-bound journey. As a matter of fact, the Āḻvār has still not got off the ground and yet, so sanguine is he of his ascent to Heaven that he feels that he is already well on the way.

(ii) The Āḻvār points out to his mind that the Lord has placed His good offices at his disposal, during his ensuing journey through the stellar route, true to His assurance of yore, 'Mokṣayiṣyāmi Māśucaḥ' (Bhagavad Gita XVIII-66). The mind wishes to know what precisely the Āḻvār expects of it, at this crucial juncture and the Āḻvār wants it to scornfully laugh at the hellish existence he had hitherto eked out, wallowing in the stye of worldly life, miserably bound down to home and hearth The original text of this song specifically says that the Āḻvār called upon his mind to laugh at 'hell' but it need not be literally taken so, as life over here, entailing the ungodly pursuit, the scramble for food and raiment, is just as bad as hell. It is a disdainful laughter of dissociation from 'Samsāra', which had kept the Āḻvār in its unrelenting grip, for ages. Piḷḷai Aḻakiya Maṇavāla Perumāḷ Araiyar, who was confined to sick-bed for quite some length of time, received one day the temple honours, the garland worn by Lord Raṅganātha and the head-gear, sent to his residence, signifying the Lord's benedictive send-off of the ailing devotee to Heaven. Thereupon, the savant recited this song and called upon his mind to laugh down his malady.

But then, it might be asked whether the Āḻvār should not have done all this jeering at 'Samsāra', his erstwhile

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comrade of ages, from the yonder side of Heaven, instead of doing it, while he is still in this land. Well, the Āḻvār has not the slightest doubt about his impending ascent to Heaven and actually, he has before him the glorious vision of the Lord sporting the honey-studded tuḷacı garlands, mounted on Garuḍa. The Āḻvār is indeed amazed at that he bears on his head the feet of the Lord, although He is mounted aloft, on Garuḍa's hefty back.

talaimēla tāḷ-iṇaikaḷ; tāmaraıkkaṇ eṇ ammāṇ
nilaiperāṇ eṇ neñcattu, eppoḷutum; em perumāṇ,
malai māṭattu aravu-aṇaimēl vāṭṭāṟṟaṇ, matam mikka
kolai yāṇai maruppu ocittāṇ, kurai kaḷalkaḷ kuṟukiṇamē.
(X-6-6)

Translation

The lovely pair of feet of my lotus-eyed Sire,
I wear on my head, stays He in my heart for ever,
My Lord, Who unto me His glory did reveal,
Reclines on serpent-couch amid castles tall,
In Tiruvāṭṭāṟu; the valorous feet we did attain
Of the Lord by Whom the monstrous elephant was slain.

Notes

(i) Once again, the Āḻvār enumerates the favours heaped on him by the benign Lord. Having set His lovely pair of feet on the Āḻvār's head, the Lord casts on him glances, cool and sweet, from His lotus eyes. And then, He stands firmly in the Āḻvār's heart, rivetted, as it were. Questioned by his disciples, as to how the Lord could simultaneously stand on the Āḻvār's head, cast His sweet glances on him and stay inside his heart, Nampiḷḷai cited the example of Sage Saubhari who assumed fifty different forms to enjoy conjugal bliss with his fifty wives. The Lord should have likewise assumed a number of forms to enjoy the Āḻvār in different ways, all at once.

(ii) Describing the Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, as reclining on the serpent couch, the Āḻvār would appear to picture in

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his mind the stepping on to the Lord's lap, right on His serpent couch in the yonder heaven, by the 'Muktā' (Released Soul), as the Upaniṣads make out.

(iii) The slaying of Kuvalayāpītam, the formidable elephant in must set upon Lord Kṛṣṇa by the tyrannical Kamsa, by the Lord pulling out its tusks, signifies the riddance by the Lord of all ills and evils, the impediments in the way of the Āḻvār attaining Him.

kurai kaḻalkaḷ kuṟukiṉam; nam kōvintaṉ kuṭikoṇṭāṉ,
tirai kuḻuvu kaṭal puṭai cūḻ teṉ nāṭṭut tilatam aṉṉa
varai kuḻuvu maṇi māṭa vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ malaṟ aṭimēl,
virai kuḻuvu naṟum tuḻavam meynniṉṟu kamaḻumē (X-6-7)

Translation

The valorous feet I did attain of Kovintaṉ Who has His abode
In me, the sweet aroma does thus my body exude
Of the tuḻaci, with fragrance intense, at the lotus feet of the Lord
In Tiruvāttāṟu, the crest jewel of the South, with Castles tall,
Surrounded by the Sea whose waves in numbers swell.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār said that he had attained the Lord's valorous feet and now he repeats it authoritatively, adducing the evidence to prove his statement. The Āḻvār's body smells sweet, exuding the fragrance of tuḻaci and this would be possible only if he came in close contact with the Lord at whose lotus feet there is the tuḻaci, with its profusion of perfume c.f. VIII-9-10, where the Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī's (Āḻvār transformed figuratively into a female lover) mate conclusively proves to the elders around, the union of the Nāyakī with the Lord, enshrined in Kuṭṭanāṭṭu Tiruppuliyūr, from the fragrance of tuḻaci emanating from her body.

meynniṉṟu kamaḻ tuḻava virai ēṟu tirumuṭiyaṉ,
kaimniṉṟa cakkarattaṉ karutum iṭam porutu, puṉal
mainniṟa varai pōlum tiru uruva vāṭṭāṟṟāṟku
en naṉṟi ceytēṉā-eṉ neñcil tikaḻvatuvē? (X-6-8)

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Translation

Oh, what is the merit in me, that in my heart beams the Lord
Who stays in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, like unto a mountain of emerald,
Wearing on His crown, tuḷaci, full of fragrance that ever lasts
On my person, Who the warring discus wields that darts
At the target the Lord intends and gets back as victor smart?

Notes

(i) There was hardly any merit in him as far as the Āḷvār could scan and yet the Lord has chosen to shower on him a plethora of benefits. No wonder then, the Āḷvār is amazed at the overwhelming grace of the Lord, bestowed on him with sweet spontaniety.

(ii) The text, in this song, describing the pervasive fragrance of the tuḷaci garland worn by the Lord, lends itself to more than one interpretation. It could mean that the sweet fragrance of the tuḷaci, worn on the Lord's crown, permeates the entire body of the Āḷvār by virtue of the Lord's entry into his heart. It could also mean that the aroma of the tuḷaci migrated upwards from the Lord's body and stuck to His crown.

It is indeed interesting that the Lord's discus performs its job with push-button precision; when the thought of punishing an adversary just crosses the Lord's mind, it is as good as pressing the button, signalling to the discus the target in question. The discus darts with lightning speed, hits the target, all right and gets back to the Lord.

(iii) Unable to discover any good in him even by extra-liberal standards, not even anything bearing the semblance thereof, the Āḷvār is aghast with wonder at the Lord's great gesture.

tikaḷkiṉṟa tirumārpil tirumaṅkai-taṉṉōṭum
tikaḷkiṉṟa tirumālār cērviṭam taṉ vāṭṭāṟu;
pukaḷniṉṟa puḷ ūrti, pōr arakkar kulam keṭuttāṉ,
ikaḷvu iṉṟi, eṉ neñcattu, eppoḷutum piriyāṉē. (X-6-9)

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Translation

How is it, Tirumāl on Whose resplendent chest does Tirumaṅkai beam,
Who dwells in cool Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, Who plies the bird of standing fame,
As His vehicle, Who the militant Asuras did blast,
Stays for ever in my despicable heart, with no disgust?

Notes

(i) Surely, it is the farthest limit up to which the Lord's love for His devotees could go; the Lord has chosen to stay firmly and, for ever, in the Āḻvār's despicable heart, without the slightest disgust or uneasiness.

(ii) The Lord, Who has got lodged on His winsome chest Lakṣmī, the Goddess of affluence, stays in cool Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, with Garuḍa, famed as the very embodiment of Vedas, as His favourite mount. And yet, one of such peerless eminence has chosen to stay, firm and fast, in the Āḻvār's heart, as if He has nowhere else to go, rather, does not like to go anywhere else. What is at the bottom of this massive love of the Lord? Well, this is what is exercising the Āḻvār's mind at the moment.

piriyātu āṭcey eṉṟu, piṟappu aṟuttu, āḻ aṟak koṇṭāṉ,
ari āki, iraṇiyaṉai ākam kīṇṭāṉ, aṉṟu;
periyārkku āṭpaṭṭakkāl, peṟāta payaṉ peṟumāṟu,
vari vāḻ vāy aravu-aṇaimēl vāṭṭārṟāṉ kāṭṭiṉaṉē. (X–6–10)

Translation

Blest am I with unremitting service unto the Lord,
Cut out from worldly bondage; my Sire who tore to shreds
Iraṇiyaṉ's body as Ari of yore and does on serpent-bed
Now relax at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, has indeed demonstrated
That by His sweet grace do accrue unattainable gains
Unto those that remain as vassals of the great ones.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's great gains, far exceeding even the dreamiest of his expectations are: The Lord's own utterance from

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His coral lips, inviting the Āḻvār to render unto Him unremitting service in close proximity and actually taking service from him; He has also halted the dreadful cycle of birth and death. Gains of this magnitude cannot be secured by one's own efforts, however long and strenuous and only the Lord's spontaneous grace, totally unrelated to one's merit, can shower such immense benefits which the text of the song, as in the original, terms as the *attainment of unattainable gains.* And now, the Āḻvār even goes to the length of bringing within the purview of this special category of gains, each one of the Lord's past incarnations, as Arı [Naraśiṅga (Man-Lion) etc.] as if they were all directed towards salving the Āḻvar and catering to his exclusive enjoyment.

(ii) It has been clearly elucidated in the episode of Kṣatrabandhu, occurring in 'Viṣṇudharma', how those blest by the 'Mahātmās', the great ones, are doled out rich benefits of rare magnitude. These mighty donors are not weighed down by considerations of either the pettiness of their recipients or the greatness of the benefits granted to them. In other words, these great souls do not shrink back and withhold their bounty, looking at the rich, intrinsic value of their gifts vis-a-vis the poor stature of the donees. As a matter of fact, even Prahlāda did not enjoy the proud privilege, conferred by the Lord on the Āḻvār, of singing 'Tiruvāymoḷi'. Little wonder then, the Āḻvār deems it an unattainable gain attained by him, a rare piece of service, graciously assigned to him by the Lord.

kāṭṭit taṉ kaṇai kaḷalkaḷ, kaṭu narakam pukal oḻitta,
vāṭṭārṟu em perumāṉai vaḷaṅ kurukūrc cāṭakōpaṉ
pāṭṭāya tamiḻ-mālai āyirattul ip pattum
kōṭṭu ārār vāṉavarkaḷ, cevikku iṉiya ceñcollē. (X-6-11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand,
Composed by Caṭakōpaṉ, in chaste Tamil, the hymnal garland,
Adoring the Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, Who did graciously reveal

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His lovely pair of feet and rid him of [Samsāra] the cruel hell,
Will unto the ears of the Celestials be a treat insatiable.

Notes

(i) This end-song, which usually details the benefits accrued to the chanters of the songs, in this decad, says that these songs will feast the ears of the Celestials, in Heaven sumptuously and that they will never feel satiated. On the face of it, this sounds like a departure from the general pattern of the end-songs of the other decads. But it is not so. What is actually meant to be conveyed by this song is that the chanters of this decad will surely go to Heaven and there again recite these ten songs, much to the delectation of the 'Nityas' (Eternal heroes) and 'Muktas' (released souls) over there, who would want to hear these songs, over and over again, without satiety.

(ii) Unlike Tontaratippoti Āḻvār, who concludes his 'Tirumālai', the hymnal garland comprising fortyfive songs, referring to them, in all humility, as petty and immature, Nammāḻvār speaks of Tiruvāymoḻi, in such glorious terms as 'Ceñcol' (choice diction, sweet and chaste), a grand treat indeed, even to the exalted denizens of the Eternal Land who go into raptures the very moment these songs fall on their ears. The Āḻvār is but the mouth-piece of the Lord, Who sang these songs through His chosen medium. So sweet and scintillating are these songs that they throw the very medium into raptures. In this particular decad, the Lord enshrined in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu is depicted as the Grand Deliverer, ready to take the Āḻvār to Heaven, ridding him of the earthly bondage and all that goes with it. Even the chanters of this decad are assured of heavenly ascent and when they reach Heaven, those on the yonder side curiously enquire as to what is going on on earth. The new-comers would naturally refer to Saint Nammāḻvār and his glorious hymns as of outstanding

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interest, whereupon the heavenly denizens would insist upon listening to these hymns sung by the former. And now, the ball is set in motion and the recital goes on, over and over again, pressed ever more by the incessant demands of the rapturous audience.

Tenth Centum—Seventh Decad (X-7)
(Ceṉcol kavikāḷ)

Preamble

We saw the Āḻvār bursting with joy in the last decad. The Lord, Who stuck fast to the Āḻvār's heart, would now want to get hold of the Āḻvār's entire physical frame, limb by limb, like unto the flies swarming, in and around the jack-fruit. Well, what is the Lord's fascination for this elemental body, which the gnostics (Jñānis) have no hesitation in condemning as foul and are ready to give up, any moment? The sweet aroma of spiritual awakening, emanating from the Jñāni's body is indeed very pleasing to the Lord, Who, therefore, covets him and adores him, in that mortal frame, with all its dirt and stench, like unto the erotic lover doting on the body of his beloved, unmindful of its drawbacks. Do not the ladies wear, on their locks, the fragrant root, dug out of the earth, without shaking off the earthen particles of dust, lest it should diminish the fragrance?

In the case of the Āḻvār, the Lord bore unlimited love for him and He was even thinking in terms of lifting him up to heaven, with this very body. The Āḻvār, who got scent of this extraordinary thinking on the part of the Lord, even apprehended that the prolongation of his stay in this abode, in his material body, might be due to the misplaced affection of the Lord for his physical frame. The Āḻvār, therefore, realised the imperative need of his disabusing the Lord of his notions, in this regard. As a matter of fact, the Āḻvār is now free to dictate terms to the Lord in accordance with the latter's ardent desire to serve the former. The Āḻvār could, therefore, advise the Lord to do certain things and desist from doing certain other things. In the latter category would fall the Lord's contemplated move to lift the Āḻvār bodily to Heaven. Cornered thus, the Lord abandoned His over-ambitious project, submitting to the Āḻvār's will. That the Sovereign Lord

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should desist from putting through His cherished desires, purely in deference to the Āḻvār's mandatory injunction, excites the Āḻvār's admiration of the Lord's amazing simplicity and tender solicitude, all the more. Literally lost in contemplation of these extra-ordinary traits of the Lord, the Āḻvār could regain his normal composure only after quite some length of time Therefore it is, he puts others on their guard in this decad, lest they should also fare likewise, meditating on the Lord's amazing simplicity and loving condescension. This is just like men who have struggled through deep waters and got ashore, cautioning others wading through the waters against the treacherous pit-falls which they would do well to avoid, thus placing before others the benefit of their own experience. Actually, the Āḻvār is warning like-minded poets, steeped in the selfless enjoyment of the Lord's auspicious traits, not to get involved in these enthralling traits of the Lord but just skip over them, lest they should also be ensnared and get bogged down, as he did.

The Lord, who exhibited such a great predilection for the Āḻvār's physical frame, is depicted, in this decad, as the One enshrined in Tirumāliruñcōlai (in Tamil Nāḍu) Omni-scient though, the Lord's love for the Jñāni is so deep and intense that He dotes on the physical frame of the Jñāni, which the latter detests, as foul and despicable. The Lord has to be weaned away from His misplaced blandishment of the Jñāni's body by the latter's stern advice to desist from it, seeing that it is made up of the elements and is full of dirt and stench and the Lord shall not, therefore, defile and desecrate the exalted Heaven by introducing therein his physical body. vide aphorism 185 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam', characterising the Lord at Tirumāliruñcōlai as the one doting on the the Jñāni's despicable body.

ceñcol kavikāḷ! uyir kāttu āṭceymmiṉ; tirumāliruñcōlai
vañcak kaḷvan, mā māyaṉ, māyak kaviyāy vantu, eṉ
neñcum uyirum uḷ kalanṭu,niṉṟār aṟiyāvaṇṇam, eṉ
neñcum uyirum-avai uṇṭu, tāṉē āki, niṟaintāṉē. (X–7–1)

Translation

Beware, Ye poets, singing songs, sweet and chaste,
Better be all attention, as you sing, else you can't subsist;

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The Lord in mount Tirumāliruñcōlai is the mysterious One,
Who does deceit and stealth practise; unto me He held on,
Ostensibly to sing these songs but into my heart and soul
Secretly He did dissolve and consumed them all;
Thus displacing me, He did attain His stature full.

Notes

(i) *Poets, sweet and chaste*: Poets composing songs in elegant diction, abounding in choice words, pregnant with meaning, are said to be sweet and if they also happen to be selfless singers of the Lord's glory, they are chaste indeed. This combined appellation would, however, cover only a few poets of the eminence of the first three Āḻvārs (Poikai, Pēy and Pūtattāḻvār), the super poets, thrilling with spiritual joy and throbbing with God-love. To this exalted band of poets, the Āḻvār utters the warning, as in this song. Their very existence will be imperilled if they ever trod upon the plank of the Lord's 'Saulabhya', simplicity galore, which will choke them down, in admiration, even to the point of losing themselves altogether. Evidently, the artist has to make sure of his existence, first and foremost, so that his art can flourish. When the art takes the form of service unto the Lord (Vācika Kaiṅkarya), it is but appropriate that the Āḻvār warns the artists in question against the danger lurking in the field. If they are to ensure steady and unremitting service unto the Lord, they should not go anywhere near the Lord's enthralling traits of simplicity, easy accessibility and tender solicitude, which had rendered the Āḻvār insensate thrice, the period of suspended animation lasting as long as six months on each such occasion. The Āḻvār is thus planting the danger signal, in the vulnerable spot, for the guidance of the fellow-poets of his ilk.

Sri Rāmānuja would have it, in this context, that the person to be saved is not the fellow-artist but the Lord Himself. When the Lord, in His unbounded love for the Jñāni's physical frame, pounces upon him, if the

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Jñāni went on repelling His advances, surely, he may have to lose the Lord altogether. Actually, the Āḷvār reverently called the Lord's attention to His trait of subserving the devotees (āśṛtapāratantarya) and, in the exercise thereof, He was made to desist from His ravishing love for the devotee's body, frail and foul. Thus inhibited from the pursuit of His natural inclination, the Lord stood aloof from the Āḷvār who, however, got completely lost in rapturous meditation on the Lord's remarkable docility in heeding his humble request. The Āḷvār, therefore, warns the fellow-artists not to fare likewise and lose the Lord in the manner he did, but conform to His wishes and place no obstruction in His path and thus preserve Him.

(ii) When the Lord initially entered the Āḷvār's heart, the latter was made to feel that He did so only to establish His supremacy over him. But then, He played His stealthy pranks by reversing the natural order of things and displaying the riotous love of the ardent lover. The pity of it is that the Āḷvār fell into His trap, notwithstanding the prior knowledge he had of the Lord, in this respect. Well, therein lies the Lord's mystery to which all of us cannot but succumb. All that the Lord applied for, at the outset, was a little space in the heart-region of the Āḷvār, so as to produce from there songs of rare excellence and the Āḷvār readily responded to the Lord's request, as he was himself wanting to sing such songs. But what happened! He who wanted just that space for the tip of His little finger to enter, got His head penetrated as well. Is this not stealth, pure and simple? What else is it but deceit, on His part?

[Oh, what a pity! there is such a miserable dearth of interest for these priceless gems of thought, imbedded in the Āḷvār's glorious hymns, as unfolded by our great Ācāryas. There are hardly a few who would come forward to delve deep into this vast treasure of Divine Love and it is only to be hoped that, with the

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publication of the present glossary, their numbers would swell much beyond all expectations].

tāṉē āki, niṟaintu, ellā ulakum uyirum tāṉē āy,
tāṉē yāṉ eṉpāṉ āki, taṉṉait tāṉē tutittu, eṉakkut
tēṉē, pālē, kaṉṉalē, amutē, tirumāliruñcōlaik
kōṉē āki, niṉṟolintāṉ-eṉṉai muṟṟum uyir uṇṭē. (X–7–2)

Translation

Me the Lord did, in full, consume
And now full has He become;
The inner soul of worlds and beings, one and all
Stands now transformed into me, I do feel,
He lauds Himself thro' me and sweet unto me
Like candy and nectar, milk and honey,
Lord of Tirumāliruñcōlai He has now become.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār finds that the Lord, Who mingled with him, completely displaced him and spread Himself out, in full, over the entire body of the Āḻvār; nay, He attained perfection and His sovereign stature only after this event. He could become God indeed only after the songs of His glory flowed from the sweet lips of the Āḻvār. It can be recalled that it is the Āḻvār who asserted the Supremacy of the Lord, vide II-2 and IV-10 of this hymnal.

(ii) The present predicament, in which the Āḻvār, basically the Lord's vassal, is being subserved by Him, has been aptly described by the great Nampiḷḷai in his unique diction, as follows: Dislodged from his normal stance, the Āḻvār gropes in vain to get at himself; all that he could discover, in the process, is that he is being carried aloft over the Lord's head.

(iii) The Lord is not merely the object of laudation but the very author of laudation, singing, as He does His own glory through the medium of the Āḻvār. If, in the end-song of each decad, it is said that it is Caṭakōpaṉ's

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(Āḻvār's) utterance, well, it is the Lord, Who made him say so.

(iv) The Lord is exceedingly delicious to the Āḻvār, but instead of his drinking deep of that insatiable nectar, the Lord forestalled him and drank him up, leaving no trace of him behind.

eṉṉai muṟṟum uyir uṇṭu, eṉ māya ākkai-itaṉuḷ pukku,
eṉṉai muṟṟum tāṉē āy niṉṟa, māya ammāṉ cēr
teṉ naṉ tirumāliruñcoḻait ticai kaikūppic cērnta yāṉ
iṉṉum pōvēṉēkolō? eṉkol ammāṉ tiru-aruḷē? (X–7–3)

Translation

The mysterious Sire in Tirumaliruñcōlai did my life consume in full,
Entered He my material body and displaced me so well
That in Him I stand transformed, heart and Soul,
Facing south, Him I did adore with joined palms
And His vassal have I now become,
Shall I from here go elsewhere, leaving Him.
What indeed is the extent of His grace supreme?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār re-iterates that the Lord consumed him, in full, heart and Soul, deeming it a matter of great privilege and supreme joy, as if He had attained something unattainable. Nampiḷḷai has it that the Lord's greatness and grandeur got heightened by His contact with the Āḻvār, even as His excellence shot up, while in conjunction with Goddess Mahālakṣmi, c.f. "Yasya sā janakātmajā, aprameyaṃ hi tat tejaḥ" (Valmīki Rāmāyaṇa) which says that Lord Rāma's prowess grew up to unlimited dimensions after His union with Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka.

(ii) The Lord at Tirumāliruñcōlai bestowed on the Āḻvār's physical frame boundless love, although the Āḻvār was disgustingly aware of its drawbacks and was keen, as ever, on giving it up. The Āḻvār admired the Lord

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whose love for him shot up to such incredible lengths, the pilgrim centre where He lovingly resided and the very direction in which it was located. Would he, therefore, think of looking beyond this favourite centre of the Lord whose hot favourite he is? It is indeed bewildering that the Lord's love for the Āḻvār has not reached the limits of satiety, even after His mingling with him so thoroughly, displacing him, as it were, and nullifying his separate entity. The Āḻvār is aghast with wonder, at the influx of the Lord's grace, defying description and baffling his imagination.

eṉkol ammāṉ tiru-aruḷkaḷ– ulakum uyirum tāṉē āy,
naṉku eṉ uṭalam kaiviṭāṉ; ñālattūṭē naṭantu, uḷakki,
teṉ koḷ ticaikkut tilatamāy niṉṟa tirumāliruñcōlai
naṅkaḷ kuṉṟam kaiviṭāṉ, naṉṉā acurar naliyavē? (X–7–4)

Translation

What indeed is the extent of my Sire's lovely grace!
Unto my body He holds on with love supreme and the sacred Mount,
Tirumāliruñ Cōlai He sticks to likewise, the crest jewel of the South,
The Soul Supreme of all things and beings, He did traverse
The whole Earth so as to crush the ungodly Asuras.

Notes

(i) The text of the song, in original, refers to the Lord's peregrination on Earth but the inner meaning thereof seems to be that, under the pretext of spanning the entire universe as Tṛvikrama, the Lord was actually in search of a favourite spot where He could hold uninterrupted rapport with the Āḻvār and enjoy him to His heart's fill. Tirumāliruñcōlai was the beauty spot, thus chosen by the Lord and it is there that the Lord lavished His affections on the Āḻvār. The Lord's love of that place stems from the realisation of the fact that it is there that He could enjoy the Āḻvār, in the manner He did. In other words, the Lord thoroughly enjoyed the

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Āḻvār, body and Soul and Mount Tirumāliruncōlai also, as the breeding ground of the Lord's enjoyment of the Āḻvār. Incidentally, this special felicity of the Lord floored the hostile Asuras down, with envy.

(ii) The Sovereign Lord, above wants of any kind, is so madly in love with the Āḻvār and hankers after his material body, like unto a wayward prince lavishing his affections on a low-caste woman, literally bound to her feet. The Āḻvār euphemistically refers to the Lord's bewilderment, as His grace, instead of curtly naming it as delusion or mental aberration.

(iii) As already elucidated in X-4-4, the Lord's stay in the pilgrim centres is not an end in itself but only the means for the reclamation of His subjects, His ultimate destination being the heart-centre of the spiritually regenerated subjects.

(iv) *Crushing the ungodly Asuras*: This is interpreted in two ways:

(*a*) The Asuras, who prattle heresies, that is, go about shouting that the Lord is devoid of form and attributes, dwindle down with shame the moment they see the Lord in His worshippable Form in Tirumāliruñcōlai, in all His splendour.

(*b*) Those, that hitherto belittled the greatness of Saint Nammāḻvār, in terms of his parentage and all that, also shrink down with shame, when they see the Lord's profusion of love for the Āḻvār.

naṉṉā acurar nalivu eyta, nalla amarar polivu eyta,
eṉṉātaṉakaḷ ēṉṉum nal muṉivar iṉpam talaicirappa,
paṉ ār pāṭal iṉ kavikaḷ yāṉāyt taṉṉāit tāṉ pāṭi,
teṉṉā eṉṉum-eṉ ammāṉ, tirumāliruñcōlaiyāṉē. (X–7–5)

Translation

My Sire, Who into me dissolved and sang songs, sweet and chaste,
Humming joyfully, which sealed the hostile Asuras' fate

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But made the friendly Devas exult, which sent into raptures
The meditative sages who keep wishing the expansion evermore,
Of His auspicious attributes and glory great,
Is the One who has Tirumāliruñcōlai, as His habitat.

Notes

(i) "What a great connoisseur and how deeply interested!" exclaims the Āḻvār, when he sees the Lord who mingled with him and made him sing this great hymnal of Tiruvāymoḷi, humming with joy, as He listened to these songs.

(ii) The friendly Devas flourish while the Asuras, hostile and ungodly, perish, as a result of the Lord's incarnations. The same results are achieved by Tiruvāymoḷi also. The Lord's devotees prosper by learning and chanting Tiruvāymoḷi while the ungodly heretics get badly exposed by this soul-stirring hymnal, cutting across their ill-conceived tenets, their false doctrines and foul rhetoric. This is best illustrated by the following episode:

Kṛmikaṇṭa, a Cōḷa king carried a crusade against Vaiṣṇavism. When his little son succeeded the felonious father, he observed, with great feeling, "Alas! what has my father done? How stupid of him to have fancied that Vaiṣṇavism could be wiped out by just demolishing a temple or two! Did he not know that, unlike the dead walls of the temple, Vaiṣṇavism is bounded by the living walls of Tiruvāymoḷi and Rāmāyaṇa, the two impregnable fortresses?"

(iii) At a conclave held by the sages, it was felt that there was, as yet, no hymn, which lauded adequately the Lord's auspicious Form, attributes and cosmic wealth and that they should all pray unto the Lord to get the void duly filled up. These very sages met again after the advent of Tiruvāymoḷi. While they were jubilant that their prayers had been heard and that 'Tiruvāymoḷi' was the very thing they had pined

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for, they found that this great hymnal had covered, *in toto*, the Lord's attributes, wealth, manifestations etc. They, therefore, wished that the Lord should have many more of these, affording scope for further laudation of them all! Here then is a grand reorientation of their intial trend of thought, which at once proclaims Tiruvāymoḷi's greatness and grandeur as the laudatory hymnal, *par excellence*.

tirumāliruñcōlaiyāṉē ākı, ceḷu mūvulakum taṉ
oru mā vayiṟṟiṉ uḷḷē vaittu, ūḷi ūḷı talaıyaḷikkum
tirumāl, eṉṉai āḷum māl, civaṉum piramaṉum kāṇātu
aru māl eytı, aṭi parava, aruḷaı inta ammāṉē. (X–7–6)

Translation

The Supreme Lord Whom even Civaṉ and Piramaṉ couldn't attaın,
Did on them shed Hıs grace, when they intensely adored
His lovely feet; He did in his stomach unique sustain
The three worlds bright, at the end of each epoch and delivered;
That Tırumāl stands now ın Tırumālıruñcōlai and is very keen
To enlıst me as Hıs vassal, shedding on me Hıs love supreme.

Notes

(ı) The Lord, who sustaıned ınsıde Hıs little stomach all the worlds during the deluge, now wants to sustain Himself by clınging to the Āḷvār of whom He is passionately enamoured.

(ii) The Lord, who is well beyond the reach of even the exalted Śiva and Brahmā, is now after the Āḷvār and it is only to get at him that He has come down to Tırumālıruñcōlai.

aruḷai i eṉ ammāṉē! eṉṉum mukkaṇ- ammāṉum,
teruḷ koḷ piramaṉ-ammāṉum, tēvar-kōṉum, tēvarum,
iruḷkaḷ kaṭiyum muṉivarum, ēttum ammāṉ tirumalai—
maruḷkaḷ kaṭiyum maṇimalai-tirumāliruñcōlai malaiyē.
(X–7–7)

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Translation

Tirumāliruñcōlai, the lovely mount, which dispels all ignorance,
Is where stays our Lord Who is well adored with great reverence
By the triple-eyed Sire, Piramaṉ, famed for clear intelligence,
The Devas and their Chief and sages who steer clear of dark nescience.

Note

Seeing that Tirumāliruñcōlai is the place from where all that felicity, currently enjoyed by him, flows, the Āḻvār now adores that mountain itself, as the one that dispels ignorance and all other kindred impediments which stand between us and our destined goal. What more? It is the place coveted by the Lord who is adored by the exalted Devas, Śivā and Brahmā and enlightened sages, with deep devotion.

tirumāliruñcōlai malaiyē, tiruppāṟkaṭalē, eṉ talaiyē,
tirumāl vaikuntamē, taṉ tiruvēṅkaṭamē, eṉatu uṭalē,
aru mā māyattu eṉatu uyirē, maṉamē, vākkē, karumamē,
oru mā noṭiyum piriyāṉ-eṉ ūḻi muṭalvaṉ, oruvaṉē. (X–7–8)

Translation

The Lord Supreme, the first cause of all things, shall not bear
Being apart, even for a trice, from my head, held on a par
With Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai and the Milky Ocean, my physical frame,
Coveted by Him like the high Heaven and Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
My soul, badly mixed up with matter, my thought, word and deed.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is amazed at the astounding love exhibited by the Lord unto him, rather every inch of his body, easily the aggregate of the love borne by Him for the sacred centres of front-rank eminence, like Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai, Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the Milky Ocean and the High Heavens (Śrī Vaikuṇṭa). So deep

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and intense is the Lord's love that He shall not brook separation from the Ā'vār's physical frame and each anatomical part thereof, even for a split second.

(ii) The text of the song, as in the original, makes it out that the Lord, who lavished all His affections on each of the holy centres, referred to above, bestowed all that love on each one of the Āḻvār's limbs exclusively. This is precisely how sage Saubhari enjoyed marital bliss with each one of his fifty wives, all at once, assuming as many forms. Each one of the fifty spouses could thus assert that her husband was in her exclusive possession and enjoyment and had nothing to do with any one else.

(iii) All things and beings subsist in Him, both in the primordial or the unevolved, unmanifest state as well as in the evolved, manifested condition, not being viable by themselves, otherwise than in conjunction with Him. And now, that very Lord cannot brook even a moment's separation from the Āḻvār, as if the former subsists in the latter and cannot claim viability, on His own.

ūḻi mutalvaṉ oruvaṉē eṉṉum oruvaṉ, ulaku ellām
ūḻitōṟum taṉṉuḷḷē paṭaittu, kāttu, keṭuttu, uḻalum
āḻivaṉṉaṉ, eṉ ammāṉ, am taṉ tirumāliruñcōḻai—
vāḻi, maṉamē!–kaiviṭēl; uṭalum uyirum maṅka oṭṭē. (X-7-9)

Translation

Lose not your hold, my mind, on Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai,
Cool and lovely,
The seat of my majestic Sire, the One and One only,
Who did all things create, at the appropriate times,
In sole exercise of His will, sustained and dissolved them,
Persevering thus, may you, my mind, prosper ;
And may it please You, my Lord, to give up Your glamour
For my body and life and see that quickly they do wither.

Note

In the seventh song of this decad, the Āḻvār adored Mount Māliruñcōlai itself, as the one from which all that bliss,

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currently experienced by him, flows. For that very reason, the Āḻvār now advises his mind not to relax its grip on this mascot of a mountain. On hearing the Āḻvār's address to his mind, the Lord would appear to have addressed Himself not to give up the Āḻvār's body, as it was in this body, out of the vast succession of bodies occupied by him, down the ages, He was able to get hold of the Āḻvār. This naturally frightens the Āḻvār who is terribly keen on the quick dissipation and disseverence of his material body. The Āḻvār, therefore, prays unto the Lord that He should no longer desire his foul body but despise it, so as to bring about the early extinction of his body and the current span of life over here. One thing is quite clear from this, namely, the Āḻvār's prolonged existence in this abode is not due to his sins (Prārabda Karma) but due to the Lord's overwhelming love for the Āḻvār's physical frame, making the Āḻvār plead, as above.

maṅka oṭṭu uṉ mā māyai-tirumāliruñcōlai mēya
naṅkaḷ kōṉē! yāṉē nī āki, eṉṉai aḷittāṉē!
poṅku aimpulaṉum, poṟi aintum, karumentiriyam, aimpūtam,
iṅku iv uyir ēy pirakiruti, māṉ, āṅkāram, maṉaṅkaḷē. (X-7-10)

Translation

My Lord in Tirumāliruñcōlai, You are my Saviour great,
Become one with me; from your mysterious tangle, the agglomerate
Of the surging senses five, the five sensory organs,
The motor organs five, the elements five, the spirit in conjunction
With the primordial matter, the great principle, called 'mahān',
Ego and the mind, do disentangle me and deliver.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār pleaded lustily with the Lord that He should no longer desire his foul body but despise it. But the Lord could not desist from lavishing His affections on the Āḻvār's body. In order to remedy this state of affairs, the Āḻvār had to bring home to the Lord the unwholesome composition of his

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physical body and argue his case for the discarding of this body. The Lord would not, however, easily give in; if the Āḻvār's soul was very dear to the Lord, so was the body containing that soul. Does any one break the jar containing the costly cosmetics? Surely, the container derives its importance from the thing contained. Finding the Lord arguing along these lines, the Āḻvār had perforce to expatiate on the imperative necessity of the Lord despising his material body which, if at all any eminence could be attributed to it, is eminently fit to be discarded This is how the Āḻvār successfully argued his case for the Lord discarding the former's Prākṛti (material) body, right here:

'My Lord, have You not Yourself stated, in Your Song Celestial, that it is impossible for anyone to cross beyond 'Māyā', the 'Prakṛti' set up by You, which usually hinders liberation by concealing Your real nature and helps only those who have taken refuge in You? May it, therefore, please you to desist from lavishing Your affections on this prākṛtik nest, You have woven around me. I need hardly remind You that the very purpose of Your coming down here, from the high Heavens, is to bring to the fore Your special trait of subservience to Your devotees and get it stabilised. You could as well have stayed on in the yonder land, if you mean to assert Your independence even at this end, without listening to my oft-repeated request not to cling to my foul body anymore; You need not have taken the trouble to secure a foot-hold on Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai. If 'You' have become 'I' and thus established perfect identity between us, what is not palatable to me should be equally so to You. But then, You seem to be in no mood to give up Your morbid fascination for my material body. Let me now restate my case, in greater detail, so as to impress upon you the despicability of this material body, You are doting on."

(ii) So saying, the Āḻvār enumerates the twenty four principles, comprised in this material body of ours, with all its

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dirt and stench, but nevertheless inducing the illusory attachment to it, with its meretricious charms. In VIII-8, the Lord had impressed upon the Āḻvār, rather imparted to him the experience or realisation of the true nature of the 'Jīva', the individual soul, too subtle to be comprehended even by the enlightened yogis through strenuous mental effort. Now, it is the turn of the Āḻvār to draw the attention of the Lord to the characteristics of 'Acit', the inert matter, a reversal indeed of the master-disciple relationship!

māṉ āṅkāram maṉam keṭa, aivar vaṉkaiyar maṅka,
tāṉ āṅkāramāyp pukku, tāṉē taṉē āṉānait
tēṉ āṅkārap poḻil kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col āyirattuḷ
māṉ āṅkārattu ivai pattum tirumāliruñcōlai malaikkē.
(X–7–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, abounding in orchards lovely, which mention
How the Lord did his body and soul lovingly enter,
Become one with him and did his material contacts sever,
Do unto Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai pertain.

Notes

That this decad pertains to the holy centre of Tirumāliruñcōlai is evident from every song in this decad. The special significance of this fact being mentioned in this end-song can, however, be appreciated in two ways, as indicated below :

(i) In II-10, the Āḻvār had referred to this holy centre, abounding in orchards, young and gay, as one of bewildering charm. The nature of the soil is such that even Nammāḻvār, endowed with knowledge, clear and perfect, by no less than the Omni-scient Lord Himself, was thrown off his feet by the exquisite charm of Lord Aḻakar, enshrined in this centre and he entertained doubts whether the Lord's glowing crown was but the upward expansion of His facial glow and the lotus seat on which He appeared to be standing was but the

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reflection of His dazzling feet and so on. And now, it is but the corrupting influence of that very soil that made the Lord hanker after the physical body of the Āḷvār with fantastic fascination.

(ii) Again, it was due to the Lord's contact with this particular soil, that He could overcome His fascination for the Āḷvār's material frame. The object underlying the Lord's manifestation on this soil, in His worshippable Form as Aḷakar, is to highlight His creed of subserving His devotees. It was in pursuance of this creed that He yielded to the Āḷvār's advice, not to caress his body any longer.

The benefit, accrued to the chanters of this decad, could be taken as the severance of the material contact with their bodies, comprising the twentyfour principles, enumerated in the tenth song, as the Āḷvār prays unto the Lord, in this decad, for such severance.

Tenth Centum—Eighth Decad (X-8)
(Tirumāliruñcōlai)

Preamble

In the sixth decad of this centum, the Lord was indeed in great hurry to take the Āḷvār to Heaven but His speed got somewhat arrested, in the last decad, due to His passionate love for the Āḷvār's physical frame as well and His resultant desire to lift him up bodily to Heaven. The Āḷvār had to do quite a bit of talking and impress upon the Lord, the non-feasibility of his ascent to Heaven, in this physical body and ultimately the Lord had to yield. And now, when the stage is eventually set for the Āḷvār's Heaven-bound journey, the Āḷvār intercepts and accosts the Lord as follows :

"My Lord, how is it that You, Who are now in such great hurry to put me in Heaven, had coolly allowed me to drift and struggle in this land of dark nescience, all these days? Pray let me know what precisely are the underlying reasons for Your age-long indifference and Your present predilection." (see the ninth song of this decad).

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The Lord was quite aware that the Āḻvār, endowed by Him with knowledge full and complete, was a hard nut to crack and he could effectively counter all His arguments. He, therefore, discreetly kept silent, looking away from the Āḻvār, leaving it to the latter to conclude that it would but be futile to question the ways of the Sovereign Lord with unbridled independence. The Āḻvār was also quick to realise that the present dispensation of the Lord was but the influx of His sweet spontaneous grace, totally unrelated to the merit in him. It is this voluntary grace of the Lord that the Āḻvar dwells upon, in this decad, and rejoices.

tirumāliruñcōlai malai eṉṟēṉ; eṉṉa,
tirumāl vantu, eṉ neñcu niṟaiyap pukuntāṉ;
kuru mā maṇi untu puṉal poṉṉit teṉpāl
tirumāl ceṉṟu cērviṭam teṉ tiruppēṟē. (X-8-1)

Translation

Lovely Tiruppēr on the south bank of the river Poṉṉi,
Whose flood waters are with costly rubies laden,
Is the favourite resort of Tirumāl Who got into my heart
And spread Himself out in full, when I did just articulate
The name of Tirumāliruñcōlai, the holy Mount.

Note

The Āḻvār brings into focus, the Lord's redemptive grace, shed on the subjects with sweet spontaniety, on the slightest pretext. There is the vicarious reward from the Lord Who treats even the casual mention, by some one, of His names and those of the pilgrim centres, without any religious fervour behind it, as a genuine exercise in chanting these names, with due reverence. The Āḻvār's lips casually uttered the name of Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai, least aware of its special sanctity and yet, the Lord took his utterance at its face value and entered the Āḻvār's heart. Even as water finds a small aperture enough to pass through and fill the entire area within, the cloud-hued Lord entered the Āḻvār's body, mind and soul. So full of the Āḻvār is He now that He has literally become the Āḻvār. The Lord, who coveted the Āḻvār, to such an extent, is the One residing

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with Śrī Mahalakṣmi, the Divine Mother, at Tiruppēr (Appa Kuṭattāṉ) on the South bank of the river Kāvēri (also known as Poṉṉi). It is this holy conjunction of the Lord and the Divine Mother, that induced the Lord to shed His grace on the Āḻvār, in such super-abundance, overlooking the fact that his mention of the name of Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai was much-too-casual, lip-deep and no more than that.

pēre uṟaikiṉṟa pirāṉ iṉṟu vantu,
pēreṉ eṉṟu, eṉ neñcu niṟaiyap pukuntāṉ,
kār ēḻ, kaṭal ēl, malai ēḻ ulaku uṇṭum
ārā vayiṟṟāṉai aṭaṅkap piṭittēṉē. (X-8-2)

Translation

My Sire, Who does in Tiruppēr dwell, has now come
Unto me, with delight immense and in my heart stands firm;
His fill He hadn't although he gulped down the clouds seven,
The seven oceans, the seven mountains and the worlds seven,
But now He feels full, spreading Himself out inside me.

Notes

(i) The Supreme Lord did sustain, during the great deluge, all the worlds, with their vast contents and all beings, with no exception whatever. Even so, He did not feel full at all. This void was, of course, due to the absence of His contact with the Āḻvār and it was only to overcome this deficiency that the Lord stationed Himself along with His Divine Consort at Tiruppēr, on the south bank of the river Kāvēri, a vantage position from which He could enter the Āḻvār's body, under the slightest pretext.

(ii) Even as Lakṣmī, the lotus-born, gave up the lotus flower, the seat of her birth and got Herself implanted on the Lord's chest, repeatedly saying, "I won't from Him be apart, even for a trice", the Lord, Who got inside the Āḻvār's heart, went on saying, "I won't depart from here", as if some one had asked Him whether He intended to stay on there or go away after a while.

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(iii) The Lord's entry into the Āḻvār's body, heart and soul, gives one the impression of His full and complete pervasion of the Āḻvār but the fulness actually pertains to the Lord and it is He that has now become full.

piṭittēṉ; piṟavi keṭuttēṉ; piṇi cārēṉ;
maṭittēṉ maṉai vāḻkkaiyuḷ niṟpatu ōr māyaiyai;
koṭik kōpura māṭaṅkaḷ cuḷ tiruppērāṉ
aṭic cērvatu eṉakku eḷitu āyiṉavāṟē! (X-8-3)

Translation

How easily could I my Lord attain, Who dwells
In Tiruppēr, enclosed by towers with banners aloft and castles tall!
Firm indeed is my grip of His feet which cut out pestilence,
My cycle of births and that elusive trap, the dark nescience.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār keeps musing over the manner in which the Lord has come and mingled with him, out of His spontaneous grace and wonders how the Lord became so easily accessible to him. Having got hold of the Lord's feet, he is determined not to relax his grip over them hereafter. The benefits flowing from his attainment of the Lord's feet are: (1) the dreadful cycle of birth and death, perpetuating his bondage, has ground to a halt; (2) with the cessation of birth, pestilence, its by-product, has also been wiped out and (3) severance of his age-long association with Māyā, the Primordial matter, which brings on the changes of state and the chain of miseries incidental thereto, keeping its victims earth-bound and sense-buried.

(ii) An anecdote cited, in this contest, in Iṭu Commentary, is reproduced below :

Saint Rāmānuja was having a stroll in the verandah of the mutt, just after a meal, as a constitutional exercise, but abruptly recanted without proceeding further on, as usual. This was because he was reciting this

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particular decad and as he dwelt on the line of this song, referring to the Āḻvār's severance of his age-long association with 'Māyā' which had kept him in bondage from time immemorial, the Saint also abruptly stopped strolling on and entered the hall. Empār, the enlightened disciple, who was watching this through the small opening in the door of the hall, kept ajar, instantly sized up the situation and enquired whether the Saint was reciting, just then, this particular line and the latter affirmed it.

eḷitāyiṉavāṟu, eṉṟu, ēṉ kaṅkaḷ kaḷipṟak
kaḷitu ākiya cintaiyaṉāyk kaḷikkiṉṟēṉ;
kiḷi tāviya cōlaikaḷ cūḻ tiruppērāṉ
teḷitu ākiya cēṇ-vicumpu taruvāṉē. (X-8-4)

Translation

The Lord dwelling in Tiruppēr, surrounded by orchards lovely,
The home of parrots, is on the point of bestowing on me
The immaculate Heaven of splendour great; rejoice do my eyes
That the high Heaven is brought by the Lord's grace
Within my easy reach and my mind with joy does dance.

Notes

(i) *The home of parrots*: This refers to the lovely gardens in Tiruppēr, where parrots are perched merrily. This could also refer to the township of Tiruppēr, inhabited by truth-loving, knowledgeable persons who would parrot-like repeat what they had gathered from their preceptors, without any distortion or deviation.

(ii) From this land of dark nescience to the yonder land of perpetual clarity and brightness, it is indeed a far cry. And yet, the Lord, in His unbounded grace, has come forward to grant the Āḻvār, Heaven. The Āḻvār is aghast with wonder at that what would otherwise be extremely difficult of attainment is now brought by the Lord within his easy reach, indeed the Lord's grace galore. The Āḻvār's eyes beam with joy and so does his mind.

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vāṉē taruvāṉ eṉakkāy, eṉṉōṭu oṭṭi,
ūṉ ēy kurampai-itaṉuḷ pukuntu iṉṟu,
tāṉē taṭumāṟṟa viṉaikaḷ tavirttāṉ—
tēṉ ēy poḻil teṉ tiruppēr nakarāṉē. (X–8–5)

Translation

The Lord dwelling in Tiruppēr city, with orchards fine,
Where honey bees hum gaily, is intent on putting me in Heaven;
Pledged, as it were, He has unto me come, on His own
And, entering this fleshy body of mine,
Rid me of all impediments, the fruits of my past actions.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār exclaims that the Lord, enshrined in Tiruppēr, not only took a vow that He would take him to Heaven but also rid him of all impediments, the 'Puṇya' and 'Pāpa', merit and demerit respectively, the fruits of his actions, good and bad. As a matter of fact, the Lord has, all along, been very keen on taking the Āḻvār to Heaven but nevertheless kept him on, in this abode, only to get all these hymns, sung by him for the edification and enjoyment of the devotees over here. Now that this purpose of the Lord has been achieved, the Āḻvār is on the very verge of his ascent.

(ii) The Lord's ardent fervour in taking the Āḻvār to Heaven is admirably elucidated here. He has taken a vow to grant the Āḻvār, the high Heaven, failing which He would forfeit His commanding position as the Lord of Heaven. This is indeed comparable with the solemn pledges the Lord had made during His incarnation as Rāma, once in regard to His crossing over to Laṅkā, through the sea, along with His army, and again, during His encounter with Rāvaṇa. The first oath was: "Adhya me maraṇam vāpi tharaṇam Sāgarasya vā" (either I get across the ocean or give up my life); the second one was: 'Arāvaṇamarāmaṃ vā' (either Rāvaṇa or Rāma shall cease to be).

(iii) No doubt, the Lord was intent upon taking the Āḻvār bodily to Heaven but He had to yield to the Āḻvār's

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persistent demand to give up the idea. The next best He could do was to delve, with great delight, into the foul, fleshy body of the Āḻvār and cut out, *suo moto* (of His own accord) the ills and evils, separating the Āḻvār from Him. 'puṇya' (merit, accrued by dint of one's good deeds) is but a gold fetter while 'Pāpa' (sin or demerit devolving from bad deeds) is an iron fetter. A gold fetter is a fetter, all the same, and thus it is as much an impediment as the iron fetter, which sin is.

tiruppēr nakarāṉ, tirumāliruñcōlaip
poruppē uṟaikiṉṟa pirāṉ, iṉṟu vantu,
iruppēṉ eṉṟu, eṉ neñcu niṟaiyap pukuntāṉ
viruppē peṟṟu amutam uṇṭu kaḷittēṉē. (X–8–6)

Translation

The Lord in Tiruppēr city, Who does also dwell
In tirumāliruñcōlai and has many such abodes delectable,
Has this day got inside me and my heart He does fill,
Saying that there He will for ever stay; I do revel
In His love, drinking deep of that nectar insatiable.

Notes

(i) Many indeed are the enchanting abodes of the Lord in His worshippable Form and yet, He has entered the Āḻvār's heart as if He has nowhere else to go and now only He feels complacent as a 'Kṛta Kṛtya' (one who has discharged one's duty thoroughly), after getting Himself lodged in the Āḻvār's heart-region.

(ii) "*Has this day got inside me*": Why this day only and not yesterday or the day before? It only shows the dawn of the Lord's redemptive grace in having designed to come to the Āḻvār and get inside his heart, declaring that He will stay on, for ever, even as the exiled Rāma told Lakṣmaṇa in Pañcavaṭi that they would do well to set up their camp there under cover of the patronising

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wings of their most beloved Jaṭāyu, the vulture-king.—'Iha vatsyāmi Soumitre! sārdha methena pakṣiṇā.

(iii) "*My heart, He does fill*": No doubt, the Lord stays inside the heart of every one, as the Internal Controller of one and all, including the demoniac Kamsa and Śiśupāla, but His stay inside the Āḻvār's heart makes all the difference. The Lord's stay inside the Āḻvār is not as a matter of routine duty, as in the case of the generality of His subjects, but one bursting with joy and it is this exuberance of God's love for him that the Āḻvār refers to here and revels in.

uṇṭu kaḷittēṟku umaṟar eṉ kuṟai-mēlait
toṇṭu ukaḷittu, anti toḷum collup peṟṟēṉ;
vaṇṭu kaḷikkum poḻil cūḻ tiruppērāṉ
kaṇṭu kaḷippa, kaṇṇuḷ niṉṟu akalāṉē? (X–8–7)

Translation

My Sire, Who dwells in Tiruppēr with its orchards fine,
Where bees, fed on honey, go gay, stays in my view all the time,
For my eyes to feast upon; unto me thus happily fed
What is there in heaven to enjoy? I have tasted
The bliss of service supreme and to its acme am I led
Uttering the word 'namaḥ' to show that unto Him I belong.

Notes

(i) Having tasted the supreme bliss of service unto the Lord, right here, by singing these love-laden songs, (Tiruvāymoḻi), the Āḻvār is led to pause and think what more could there be for him to enjoy on the yonder side of Heaven. Uttering the word 'namaḥ' or worship of the Lord, betokening one's realisation of the true nature of the soul that one is the exclusive vassal of the Lord, totally dependent on and belonging to Him, is the logical culmination of the enjoyment of the bliss of Divine Service (kaiṅkarya rasa) "Nama

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ityeva vādhinaḥ". Such a realisation having also dawned on the Āḻvār, what more does he need?

(ii) The Lord is now feasted upon continually, by the Āḻvār's eyes which languished before, for want of this glorious vision. What is even more astounding is His firm hold on the heart of the Āḻvār. It is but natural that the Āḻvār rejoices, recounting all this felicity heaped on him by the Lord, madly in love with him.

kaṇṇuḷ niṉṟu akalāṉ; karuttiṉkaṇ periyaṉ;
eṇṇil nuṇ poruḷ; ēḻ-icaiyiṉ cuvai tāṉē;
vaṇṇa nal maṇi māṭaṅkaḷ cūḻ tiruppērāṉ
tiṇṇam eṉ maṉattup pukuntāṉ-ceṟintu iṉṟē. (X–8–8)

Translation

Subtle beyond the comprehension of those who seek to comprehend
Is the Lord Supreme: the melodic essence of all music,
The Lord now in Tiruppēr, by glittering castles bound,
Is extra-keen on taking me to Heaven; He shan't brook
Being from my eyes apart and now it is certain indeed
That He has firmly entered my mind.

Notes

The Lord, too subtle to be comprehended by those who seek to comprehend Him through strenuous efforts, is now fiercely concentrating on the elaborate arrangements to be made in connection with the ensuing journey of the Āḻvār to Heaven. The Lord's vision stands continually in front of the Āḻvār, feasting his eyes, and he is enjoying right here the blessed rapport of 'Sadā paśyanti Sūrayaḥ', the incessant communion with the Lord, on the yonder side of Heaven, the marvellous experience gone through by the denizens over there, ever fresh and exhilarating.

The Lord is subtle beyond comprehension and, in any case, none, not even the Āḻvār, can gauge and comprehend the depth of the Lord's love unto him. The Lord's aesthetic

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sense, His love for the art of music, can, at best, be summed up by saying that He is the melodic quintessence of the metrical sounds in their octaves. But then, the extent of His aesthetic delight, egging Him on to His profuse love for the Āḻvār and the manner in which He wants to exhibit it baffle all understanding.

iṉṟu eṉṉaip poruḷākki, taṉṉai eṉṉuḷ vaittāṉ;
aṉṟu eṉṉaip puṟampōkap puṇarttatu eṉ ceyvāṉ?
kuṉṟu eṉṉat tikaḷ māṭaṅkaḷ cūḻ tiruppērāṉ
oṉṟu eṉakku aruḷ ceyya, uṇarttal uṟṟēṉē. (X–8–9)

Translation

On me, despised and neglected for ages, the Lord has now turned
His attention and lodged Himself firm in my mind ;
May I ask the Lord at Tiruppēr, by solid mansions bound,
Why indeed He had shut His eyes on me all these days
But now sheds on me in super-abundance His grace,
Would He deign to explain to me the one or the other?

Notes

(i) This is the topical song of this decad. The gist of this song has alr ady been set out in the form of a dialogue, opened by the Āḻvār with the Lord, in the preamble to this decad. When asked by his disciple, Nañcīyar, as to what reply the Lord gave to the Āḻvār, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would appear to have said ;

"The Lord has obviously no answer, as such. He, who had kept aloof from the Āḻvār all these days, putting one blame or the other at his door, now feels ashamed that he had not relcaimed him earlier, and, with His eyes fastened to the ground, He keeps scratching it with his toe."—a graphic description indeed, which conveys vividly that the Lord's dispensation, either way, springs from His Swātantarya (Independence, Free will), and not willing to say so to the Āḻvār, He discreetly kept silent. The position, in this regard,

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has been thrashed out in aphorisms 102 to 113 and 228 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam'. This is summarised below.

Surely, it is the Lord's spontaneous grace that is now being shed on the Āḻvār, in super-abundance. According to his own admission, as we can cull out from his songs, the Āḻvār has not acquired any merit on his own through the pursuit of any one of the 'Sādhana traya', namely, Karma, Jñāna, Bhakti yogās, either in this birth or in the previous births. Right in this birth and that too, in a short time, God-love (Bhakti) of amazing dimensions, which would normally take ages of hard discipline to develop, has been generated in him by the Lord's sweet grace. As a matter of fact, all the effort, needed for engendering 'Bhakti' of this magnitude in the Aḻvār, has been solely on the part of the Lord, the Indefatigable Cultivator, Who sows the seed of God-love in the subject's mind and tills it to the point of fruition. It need not, for a moment, be doubted how the Lord's grace could be unilateral without the effective involvement of the subjects, by way of self-effort, directed towards earning the requisite merit, the eligibility for the descent on him of the Lord's grace. Well, even the twigs and tiny creatures of Ayodhyā went to Heaven, purely through Lord Rāma's grace while the enchanting music of Lord Kṛṣṇa's magic flute got even the trees and dumb creatures intoxicated with God-love. But then, it might be asked why the Lord should not extend such grace to one and all, instead of singling out the Āḻvār for the bestowal of His grace. This is tantamount to questioning the Lord's will and wisdom, overlooking the fundamental fact that He is the Sovereign Master, absolutely independent and, therefore, free to bestow His gifts on whomsoever He pitches upon, at His sweet will and pleasure. Tradition has it that, in the good olden days, when the king of the land passed away and there was none in the regular line of succession to succeed him, the choice of the new king was made in a peculiar way. Peculiar though, it was accepted

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by the subjects without question. The crown elephant of the state would move about, holding a garland in its trunk. The person, on whom the elephant placed the garland, was crowned forthwith. Is the Sovereign Lord open to question if this elephant was not? Again, if the king lavished his affections on a particular lady, out of so many kept in his harem, none would dare to scrutinise and question why the king did so, when there were many others in his harem, equally charming, if not more.

(ii) Granting that the Āḻvār was not conscious of any merit in him, as such, could it be that the Lord redeemed him because of some hidden merit in him (ajñāta sukṛta) leading to vicarious reward? Well, the Āḻvār, endowed with knowledge, full and complete, clear and concise, who has thrown light on himself as well as many others through his mystic comprehension right from where he was, would certainly be conscious of the hidden merit in him, if there was any such thing at all. No doubt, the Āḻvār had a God-bent mind, soaked in God-love, but these traits of 'Adveṣa' (non-hatred and non-disinclination) and 'ābhimukya' (loving attention) towards God were not the outcome of his own merit but the work of God Himself. Did not the Āḻvār admit in II-7-8, that the Lord reconditioned his foul mind and redeemed it? Again, did he not acknowledge, in the immediately preceding song (II-7-7), that it was Vāmana, his Lord, Who ushered in him a mind, laid at His lotus feet, adoring Him all the time? It may be recalled, in this context, that Nampiḷḷai would say that it was not a case of reconditioning the Āḻvār's mind, so as to make it God-bent, but one of providing a new mind altogether from the Lord's strong-room, where valuables are stored up.

(iii) If the Āḻvār, who had strayed away, far too long, veered round and said that, by his own inclination, he lodged the Lord in his mind and that both he and his mind submitted to the Lord's loving care, it should be realised that it was through the Lord's strenuous and unremitting

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endeavours that the Āḻvār could be brought round, in this manner. The mere inclination to submit oneself to the Lord's loving protection cannot, by any means, be regarded as the means employed for attaining Him, for, on the face of it, it is ludicrous to equate things which bear no comparison to each other. The casual utterance of the words 'Mādhava' and 'Tirumāliruñcōlai' without so much as the thought crossing one's mind that the former is the Lord's name and the latter, the name of a pilgrim centre very dear to Him, could no doubt come in for reward at the hands of the merciful Lord, according to His extra-liberal standards of securing the vicarious redemption of His subjects. Even so, much-too-slender that these methods are, they can hardly be regarded as the means for the attainment of the Supreme Lord. As a matter of fact, there was a time when the Lord claimed the Āḻvār as His own, and the latter repelled the former, saying that he was his own and called upon the Lord to prove His claim by adducing the relevant evidence in support thereof. The Lord was knocked down, at every turn, by the recalcitrant subject, evidence such as the 'Vedas' and the utterances of the sages being dubbed partisan, one-sided and so on. When all arguments failed, the Lord had to wean round the Subject, crossing swords with Him, by exhibiting His enthralling Form. It was this exquisite charm of the Lord that induced God-love in the straying subject and made him realise and repent that he had expropriated the Lord's property, all along, that is, looked upon his soul as belonging to him whereas it actually belonged to the Lord and thus committed a grave theft (ātmāpahāra). When all is said and done, the Lord Himself constitutes the merit (Sukṛt) for the Āḻvār's deliverance and if the Lord's redemptive grace did not alight on the Āḻvār, so far and it materialised only now, no other explanation can be adduced except attributing this to the Lord's

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sweet, spontaneous grace, alighting, at His will, on the subjects of His choice, as the Āḻvār himself has brought out now and again. Well, it is the influx of the Lord's grace that really matters and not the why and wherefore of it. Does any one who quenches the parching thirst, by drinking the milk of the cocanut, ever pause to examine beforehand how at all the milk got inside the cocanut?

uṟṟēṉ; ukantu paṇiceytu, uṉa pātam
peṟṟēṉ; ītē iṉṉam vēṇṭuvatu, entāy !
kaṟṟār maṟaivāṇarkaḷ vāḻ tiruppēr̄āṟku
aṟṟār aṭiyār-tamakku allal nillāvē. (X–8–10)

Translation

My Sire, Your lovely feet have I attained and rendered
Loving service unto You, singing these songs; what's now desired
Is but the extension of this bliss; the learned ones, well-versed
In the Vedic lore, solely devoted to you, my Lord,
In Tiruppēr enshrined, will from grief for ever be freed.

Notes

(i) After keeping quiet for a while, without furnishing any reply to the Āḻvār's query as in the last song, the Lord enquired of the Āḻvār what more he needed. The Āḻvār's reply is, as above. Having been assigned the blissful service of singing this great hymnal (Tiruvāymoḻi) there is indeed no greater felicity he could aspire. Immensely pleased with this reply, the Lord nodded His head with joy. Thereupon, the Āḻvār extolled the learned residents of Tiruppēr, rendering devoted service at the feet of the Lord enshrined there, as men well beyond the grip of grief.

(ii) It seems necessary, in this context, to clear the possible misconception that, by redeeming the Āḻvār, on His own, without any merit in him, the Lord laid Himself

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open to the charge of partiality, leading to invidious distinction, shaking the very foundation of the Śāstras and thus paving the way for emancipation of the worldlings, *en masse*, (Sarva mukti). That the Lord is above blame will be seen straightway, if due note is taken of the fact that the Lord can do precious little to those who strike a divergent path and move away from Him, all the time. It is only when the human heart sparkles with God-love, that the Lord's advance towards man will make sense. Even so, the mere fact that one is God-bent, by virtue of the inherent nature of the Soul, endowed with intelligence, cannot impart to this attitude the stature of the 'means' for attaining Him, and in fact, there is no 'means' worth the name, comparable with the 'end' attained It is a thousand pities that clarity is a far cry with quite a few people who stick to their guns with miserable obstinacy, always wanting to adduce some reason or the other, however negligible, smacking of personal effort for compelling the Lord's grace, depriving it of the element of sweet spontaniety.

nillā allal; nil vayal cūl tiruppērmēl
nallār palar vāḻ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
col ār tamiḻ āyiratiṉ ivai pattum
vallār toṇṭar āḷvatu-cūḻ-poṉ vicumbē. (X-8-11)

Translation

The devotees, well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed in chaste Tamil by Catakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, the home of many good men, in adoration
Of the Lord at Tiruppēr, which rich fields adjoin,
The holy centre with hardly any room for affliction,
Will surely hold sway over the glittering Heaven.

Note

The chanters of this decad are assured not merely of their ascent to heaven but they will go there as masters and not as mere residents.

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Tenth Centum—Ninth Decad (X-9)
(Cūḻ vicumpu aṇi mukil)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār had put the Lord, a very inconvenient question and thereby put Him in quite an embarrassing predicament. Shorn of all quibblings, the Lord would have had to say, in reply, that it was in the exercise of His unbridled independence that He had kept the Āḻvār, deep down in the mire of Saṃsāra for ages, and now, invoking the self-same trait of His, He has been pleased to extend all the favours, currently enjoyed by the Āḻvār. It would, however, be hardly appropriate for Him to say so, expecially at this crucial juncture. For Him, it was now a veritable battle of wits and He skilfully tried to tide over this unenviable situation, rather, cover it up by calling upon the clouds and the oceans to roar like an orchestra, heralding the Āḻvār's ascent to Heaven and the inhabitants of all the seven islands to bestow on him their choicest offerings. This is how the errant priest, officiating at marriage ceremonies, covers up his inadvertent mistakes in regard to the recital of the Mantras, that is, mixing up the wrong texts pertaining to the funeral obsequies, in between. On such occasions, which might, of course, be few and far between, the clever priest covers his awkwardness by vociferously commanding the piper and the drummer to play their notes in a crescendo, thereby drowning his egregious blunder in that babel.

The sweet music and the fanfare of trumpets etc., from the land of the Kinnaras, the Gandharvas and the Garuḍas in the upper regions, hailing the Āḻvār's ascent to Heaven, are made to fall on the ears of the Āḻvār; the chanks and bugles sound all over, beautiful damsels with spear-shaped eyes sing in chorus the Āḻvār's glory and the 'Maruth Gaṇas' and the 'Aṣṭa Vasus' keep chanting the 'Stotras', the laudatory hymns continually. The upward journey of the Āḻvār to Heaven through the famous "Arcirādi Mārga", the propitiation of the Āḻvār by the Angels, *en route*, the Āḻvār's entry into Heaven and the grand ovation accorded to him by the denizens on the yonder side, his access to the gem-set hall where Lord Mahāviṣṇu holds His ceremonial Durbar, duly conducted by the guides nominated for the purpose, and attainment of the Lord's lotus feet—the whole panorama is

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brought by the Lord within the Āḻvār's mental comprehension. The Āḻvār voices forth his experience, in this decad, in an esoteric manner, making it appear that the devotees of the Supreme Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, Who ascended Heaven through this exalted route exclusively earmarked for them, were greeted all along the route and received with special honours by the denizens of the upper regions, showering praises on the new-comers, so on and so forth. It could also be deduced that the Āḻvār thereby intended to infuse confidence in the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, the ardent devotees of Lord MahāViṣṇu, that they too shall surely attain the bliss, currently experienced by the Āḻvār.

cūḻ vicumpu aṇi mukil tūriyam muḻakkiṉa;
āḻ kaṭal alai tiraik kai eṭuttu āṭiṉa;—
ēḻ poḻilum vaḻam ēntiya eṉ appaṉ,
vāḻ pukaḻ nāraṇaṉ tamaraik kaṇṭu ukantē. (X–9–1)

Translation

The comely clouds in the sprawling sky did music roar,
The surging waves of the deep seas danced with joy, gifts rare,
The inhabitants of the islands seven did in their hands bear,
To greet with great joy, the on-coming devotees of my Sire
The beneficent Nāraṇaṉ of undying fame.

Notes

(i) This song describes the ecstatic manner in which even the inanimate clouds, which decorate the sprawling sky and the surging waves of the deep seas, came forward to greet the devotees of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa of undying fame, during their ascent to the high Heavens. All the seven islands wore a festive appearance and their inhabitants, one and all, held, in their hands, their choicest gifts to be offered to these Heaven-bound souls.

(ii) What a grand poetic imagery! When the clouds sang, the waves of the seas danced in accompaniment. It was all spontaneous, not made to order. When

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the Prince moves round, it is but meet that all those owing allegiance to the king should greet the royal visitor.

nāraṇaṉ tamaraik kaṇṭu ukantu, nal nīr mukil
pūraṇa poṉ kuṭam pūrittatu, uyar viṇṇil;
nīr aṇi kaṭalkaḷ niṉṟu ārttaṉa; neṭu varait
tōraṇam niraittu eṅkum toḻutaṉar-ulakē. (X–9–2)

Translation

Up in the sky, the joyous clouds, laden with water fine,
Received with honour great, Lord Nārāyaṇa's votaries,
Presenting unto them gold vessels containing water,
With coconut laid on top, the deep waters of the oceans
Did standing ovation give while the denizens
Of all the worlds set up festive banners, long and tall.

Note

Not satisfied with mere roaring with joy, as set out in the last song, the clouds present the ceremonial 'Pūrṇa Kumba' (vessel containing water, having coconut as the lid) to the distinguished sojourners; likewise, the oceanic waves, that danced, keep on expressing their joy. The denizens of the upper worlds vie with each other in setting up mammoth banners and buntings for greeting the Lord's votaries, during their ascent to heaven.

toḻutaṉar-ulakarkaḷ tūpa nal malar maḻai
poḻivaṉar, pūmi aṉṟu aḷantavaṉ tamar muṉṉē:
eḻumiṉ eṉṟu, irumaruṅku icaittaṉar, muṉivarkaḷ—
vaḻi itu vaikuntarkku eṉṟu, vantu etirē. (X–9–3)

Translation

Unto the devotees of the Lord Who once spanned the worlds,
The denizens of the upper worlds did incense burn and showered
Flowers fine; the sages did their silence break and adored

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These marchers to Heaven, welcoming them all the way; arrayed
On both sides, they did these dignitaries duly escort.

Note

There are certain upper worlds, charged with the special responsibility of guiding and conducting the released souls in their onward march to heaven. Those denizens are shown here as revering the new-comers by burning incense before them and showering on them choice flowers of outstanding fragrance. Even the sages came foward, breaking their normal vow of silence, to welcome these Heaven-bound souls and escort them.

etir etir imaiyavar iruppiṭam vakuttaṉar,
katiravar avar avar kainnirai kâṭṭiṉar;
atir kural muracaṅkaḷ alai kaṭal muḷakku otta—
matu viri tuḷāy muṭi mâtavaṉ tamarkkē. (X–9–4)

Translation

The Celestials marched ahead of the devotees of Mâtavaṉ
Who does on His crown wear honey-studded tuḷaci garland,
And put up inns to lodge *en route* these souls Heaven-bound;
The twelve Katiravars and other escorts took them along,
Showing things around, the drums they played, bellowing
Like the roaring of the seas with surging waves.

Notes

(i) The Devas in the upper regions, are said to manifest their great joy over the heavenly ascent of the devotees of Mâdhava, by playing music, *en route*, and putting up nice halting camps in enchanting surroundings, where the distinguished marchers might possibly alight and relax themselves. Even if these special camps, studiously set up by the Devas in their eagerness to serve the Heaven-bound souls, are not eventually used by the latter, the former will have the immense satisfaction of having discharged their duty, in keeping with their essential nature. There is no element of exaggeration in this, as will be borne out by those

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of us who are aware of the fact that pots of money are lavished on the face-lift of buildings and thoroughfares, which our top state-dignitaries are likely to pass through, just one after-noon. It has also turned out, in a few cases, that the V.I.P. for whose approbation or at least the avoidance of his or her displeasure, lakhs of rupees were spent overnight towards repairs and renovation of roads, erection of buntings and festoons, etc., *en route*, did not visit the place at all, due either to the cancellation of the proposed visit or last minute changes entailing the adoption of a different route altogether.

(ii) In his famous Īṭu Commentary, Nampiḷḷai deplores how these very Śrī Vaiṣṇvas, who are given such V.I.P. treatment by the denizens of the upper worlds, are, during their stay in this abode, despised and neglected by men over here. Well, the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas have nothing to worry. On the other hand, they shall rejoice if they were put down by those who hated them merely on the ground of their being the worshippers of Lord Viṣṇu, as the episode of Miḷakāḷvāṉ, already set out in the notes below III-5-5 and reproduced here as well, will show.

A certain Rājā, a rabid opponent of Vaiṣṇavism, built a number of houses for being gifted away to the poor. When Miḷakāḷvāṉ approached the Rājā for the grant of one of these houses to him, the Rājā flatly declined. When asked by the supplicant the grounds on which he was refused the hospitality, the Rājā made no secret of his aversion for Vaiṣṇavāites and broke out: "No doubt, You are worthy in other respects, but as a Śrī Vaiṣṇava and a disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja, You stand disqualified."

So great was Miḷakāḷvāṉ's love of his religion and his great preceptor that he exclaimed :

"Oh, is that so? I am mighty glad, you recognise me as a Vaiṣṇava, although I thought I was not worthy of being called one". So saying, he gathered up his

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garment, threw it up in the air and danced in sheer joy. This goes to show that the frowns of men, over here, are of no consequence to those souls, consumed by the fire of divine love. Did not the unrelenting repulsion of Vibhīṣaṇa, as the family traitor by the irate Rāvaṇa, prove a great blessing to the former?

mātavaṉ tamar eṉṟu, vācalil vāṉavar
pōtumiṉ, ematu iṭam pukutuka eṉṟalum,
kītaṅkaḷ pātiṉar kiṉṉarar, keruṭarkaḷ-
vēta naḷ vāyavar veḷvi uḷmaṭuttē. (X–9–5)

Translation

The Celestials did in the outer space assemble and revere
The great marchers to Heaven, saying " Here they are,
The devotees of Mātavaṉ" and welcomed them to their places;
The Vedic scholars of the upper worlds did unto them release
And bestow the benefits earned by their rites and rituals,
While the Kinnaras and Karuṭas sang many a song.

Note

The Celestials came out into the open to greet the devotees of Lord Mādhava Who bears Śrī Mahālakṣmī on His chest, as the favourite wards of the Divine Mother. The distinguished marchers to Heaven were accorded a warm reception by the Celestials who invited the former to visit their places and accept their hospitality. The Vedic Scholars of the upper worlds deemed it a great privilege to bestow on these marchers, the benefits, accrued by dint of their own Vedic rites and rituals. The Kinnaras and Garuḍas, famous as singers in their respective lands, also sang songs to greet the great marchers. May be that the Heaven-bound 'Released souls', pining whole-heartedly for the attainment of the Lord in Heaven, are bereft of any kind of desire for such entertainments. Nevertheless, the denizens of the respective order in the upper regions, would at once deem it their great privilege and duty to entertain these distinguished men, passing along.

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vēḷvi uḷmaṭuttalum, virai kamaḷ naṟum pukai,
kāḷaṅkaḷ, valampuri kalantu eṅkum icaittaṉar;
āḷmiṉkaḷ vāṉakam āḷiyāṉ tamar eṉṟu,
vāḷ oṉ kaṉ maṭantaiyar vāḷttiṉar-makiḷntē. (X–9–6)

Translation

The fruits of their Vedic rites the savants did offer,
The lovely smoke from the incense sweet spread all over;
Chanks and bugles sounded lustily, the damsels, bright-eyed,
Hailed the marchers, and unto them, in joyous accents, said,
"Ye, devotees of our Lord Who does the discus wield,
Sway over this country of ours may you hold."

Note

The bright-eyed 'Apsaras', the sweet damsels in the upper regions, cast their cool glances on the Lord's devotees, passing along; Overcome by spontaneous joy, these ladies welcomed the distinguished travellers with the same warmth with which the elders would greet the home-coming of an youngster who had strayed away in distant lands quite long. Nampiḷḷai would just melt down in ecstasy over the Lord's redemptive grace which elevates even the erstwhile sinners, steeped in vice, to such a commanding position as to be adored by the rank and file of those in the toṟ-most order of eminence.

maṭantaiyar vāḷttalum, marutarum vacukkaḷum
toṭarntu eṅkum tōttiram colliṉar-toṭukaṭal
kiṭanta em kēcavaṉ, kiḷar oḷi maṇimuṭi
kuṭantai em kōvalaṉ kuṭi aṭiyārkkē. (X–9–7)

Translation

When the ladies sang the glory of these great marchers
Who did from generations serve Kēcavaṉ, our Sire,
Who did repose on the ocean unfathomable and now reclines
In Kuṭantai sporting the gleaming gem-set crown,

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The 'Marutars' and 'Vacus' did their glory laud
And kept following them as far as they could.

Notes

(i) Not satisfied with what they did, in their respective areas, unto the distinguished marchers to Heaven, the 'Maruth Gaṇas' and 'Aṣta Vasus' went beyond their territorial limits, as far as they could, singing all the time the glory of these great souls on their upward journey. As a matter of fact, even these Devas, reputed for their rapid movements with immense speed, could not keep pace with the holy band on their heavenly ascent, as they were speeding fast towards the Lord in Heaven, Who would not brook separation from them, any longer.

(ii) The Heaven-bound Śrī Vaiṣṇavas are adored and revered by the people *en route*, as the hereditary vassals of the Lord, enshrined in Tirukkuṭantai (Kumbakōṇam in Tamil Nādu), the 'Insatiable Nectar'. So great was Nammāḷvār's fascination for this holy centre where the Lord reclines on the serpent-bed, out of loving condescension that he could not lift his mind off it, even at this crucial stage. Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār, who closely followed in the foot-steps of Nammāḷvāi, also began and wound up his grand hymnals by referring to the holy Tirukkuṭantai.

kuṭi aṭiyār ivar kōvintaṉ taṉakku eṉṟu,
muṭi uṭai vāṉavar muṟai muṟai etirkoḷḷa,
koṭi aṇi neṭu matiḷ kōpuram kuṟukiṉar–
vaṭivu uṭai mātavaṉ vaikuntam pukavē. (X–9–8)

Translation

The crowned denizens of Heaven spared no pains
And came forward to welcome these devotees, from generations,
Of Lord Kōvintaṉ, when they did the main entrance gain

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Of 'Vaikuntam', the abode of Mātavaṉ of form exquisite,
Bound by stately walls which lovely banners decorate.

Notes

(i) The 'Nityas', in Heaven, now come forward, in their strength, to greet the devotees from Earth, of Lord Govinda, who were enthralled by His amazing simplicity and loving condescension, during His advent on Earth. The venue where the two groups meet is just outside the main entrance to Heaven (Śrī Vaikuṇṭa). It may be noted that, while the previous song reflected the Lord's glory in His 'Arcā' (iconic) manifestation, this song highlights the Lord's trait of amazing simplicity, freely exhibited by Him during His 'Vibhava' (incarnate) state on Earth, the only place where this great trait of His could shine most.

(ii) The Lord (Śrīman Nārāyaṇa), 'Nityas' (Eternal Heroes) and 'Muktas' (Released Souls) are all decorated with crowns. But there is a difference; the Lord's crown betokens His sovereignty, His role as the Protector of one and all, while the crowns of others are their badges of śeṣatva (servanthood) or dedicated service unto the Lord.

(iii) The Heaven wears a festive look, with festoons and banners, hung across and lovely wall-decorations. Even the exceedingly charming Lord and the Divine Mother shine with special lustre, at the sight of these spiritually regenerated souls, reclaimed at long last. It is said that, when Vasudeva and Devakī saw Kṛṣṇa after Kamsa was slain, they looked years younger, overwhelmed with joy. King Daśaratha felt rejuvenated whenever he saw or thought of Rāma. Actually, the king gave expression to this sentiment, in the course of his lusty pleadings with the unrelenting Kaikeyi not to insist upon Rāma being sent into exile. (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa II-12-103).

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vaikuntam pukutalum, vâcalil vāṉavar
vaikuntaṉ tamar emar, ematu iṭam pukuta eṉṟu
vaikuntattu amararum muṉivarum viyantaṉar–
vaikuntam pukuvatu maṉṉavar vitiyē. (X–9–9)

Translation

The eternal angels did in front of the gates of Heaven wait
And with joy immense greeted these marchers great,
Saying unto them, "May you, our masters, devotees of the Lord
Of Vaikunta take over our duties and our positions hold";
The Celestials, in the perpetual service of the Lord engaged,
And the sages, in meditation steeped, deemed it their privilege
That men from Earth should go all the way to Heaven.

Note

Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār was so steeped in the enjoyment of the Lord in His Arcā (Iconic) manifestation in the 'Līlā Vibhūthi' (Sportive Universe), easily worshipped in His image form of exquisite charm, that he even ridiculed the idea of men aspiring for Heaven, like unto the senseless pursuit after the flying crow, letting go the rabbit on hand. And so, there lies the special charm in this abode of ours. It is this aspect that made the denizens in Heaven wonder how the men from Earth did at all go over to Heaven and if they did, it was only due to the former's great, good fortune. While this is how the Celestials, engaged in the perpetual service of the Lord in that heavenly setting, and the sages, absorbed in the contemplation of His innumerable auspicious traits, reacted to the entry into Heaven of the new-comers, the 'Nityas', the Eternal Angels, holding key positions in the governance over there, invited the new-comers to take their places straightaway. For example, senāpathi, the Premier Chamberlain to the Lord, would hand over his baton, the symbol of his vast authority, a gracious gesture indeed! This was because the new-comers were looked upon, by them all, as their very masters, the hot-favourites, the vassals of Vaikuṇṭanātha (Lord of Heaven), in deep love with Him. These new-comers and

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the denizens, already in Heaven, thrive alike on divine service and it is this very service that is being offered now by the latter to the former.

vitivakai pukuntaṉar eṉṟu nal vētiyar
patiyiṉil pāṅkiṉil pātaṅkaḷ kaḻuviṉar;
nitiyum, nalcuṇṇamum, niṟai kuṭa viḷakkamum
mati muka maṭantaiyar ēntiṉar-vantē. (X–9–10)

Translation

The eternal angels, by the sacred vedas adored, did deem
It their fortune great that these men have to Heaven come,
And so, they did receive them with honours great
And with due ceremonies washed their feet;
Came forward the damsels bright whose faces did like the moon shine,
In their pretty hands, they held the Lord's foot-rest fine,
The vermilion powder which is on the devotees' fore-heads worn,
Vessels, full of water with coconut lids, and lamps auspicious.

Notes

(i) The 'Nitya Sūrīs', the Eternal Angels, who never passed through the gruelling mill of Samsāra and are, therefore, known as 'asprisṭa Samsārīs', honour the 'Released Souls' just entering Heaven on such a grand scale, without the slightest tinge of superiority complex. What makes them admire the new entrants and honour them, by enthroning them and washing their feet, is the fact that these men come from the land of dark nescience, affording very little scope for God-love and yet they are steeped in selfless love of God, too deep for words, and thus have an edge over the 'Nityās' themselves. If the 'Nityās' are pure and uncontaminated, it is by-no-means surprising for there is hardly any risk of contamination in Heaven, where they have been all along. On the other hand, it is indeed praiseworthy that those on Earth, situated as they are, should ever be able to turn their attention

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God-ward and, much less, love Him solely for His sake, with no strings attached.

(ii) The faces of the damsels in Heaven brighten up, all the more, due to sheer joy at the sight of these new-comers, like unto the jubilant mother, regaled by the home-coming of the way-ward son who had strayed, for long, in distant lands.

vantu avar etir koḷḷa, mā maṇi maṇṭapattu
antam il pēriṉpattu aṭiyarōṭu iruntamai
kontu alar poḻil kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
cantaṅkaḷ āyirattu ivai vallār muṉivarē. (X-9-11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand Veda-oriented songs of Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, abounding in many a flower garden fine,
Recounting his enjoyment in Heaven of beatific bliss eternal,
In the company of the devotees great, in the gem-set hall,
Greeted by the Lord Supreme and the Divine Mother,
Will become sages, steeped in the Divine, for ever.

Notes

(i) This end-song sets out the benefit, accruing to the chanters of this decad, as being their elevation on a par with the sages in the high Heaven, immersed in incessant contemplation of the auspicious attributes of the Lord.

(ii) Oh, what a glorious ascent! How exciting, exhilarating and entertaining is this special Heaven-bound route, exclusively earmarked for the ardent devotees of Lord Mahāviṣṇu! And there, at the other end, what a glorious reception by the Celestials, *en masse*, headed by their Chief, the Lord Himself, accompanied by the Divine Mother! And then, sitting in the grand gem-set hall of Heaven, of incomparable excellence, in that august assembly, presided over by the Lord and the Divine Mother sharing His throne, is indeed the very acme of that inexhaustible bliss and beatitude.

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Well, the Āḻvār has, at long last, achieved what he had pined for, all along, namely, the enjoyment of the Lord in Heaven, in the holy company of the great ones.

(iii) The Āḻvār has now entered the second stage, namely, 'Para Jñāna', in the ascending scale of God-love, which falls into the three distinct compartments of 'Para Bhakti', 'Para Jñāna' and 'Parama Bhakti'. The first of these three stages became pronounced when the Supreme Lord, with lotus eyes, got into the Āḻvār's eyes, (I-9-8) and thus blessed the Āḻvār with His glorious vision. This 'Para Bhakti' gathered momentum and got intensified to its farthest limit in X-8-7, where the Āḻvār referred to the Lord's continuous stay in his full view, for his eyes to feast upon. The intensity of divine love, surging within, is such that it seeks to break its bounds and launch into external perception and enjoyment of the Lord, the grand vision, outstripping the narrow limits of mental comprehension (Darśana). And now, this glorious darśan, given expression to, by the Āḻvār, by way of referring to his blissful participation in the grand galaxy of the 'Nityas' and 'Muktas' in Heaven, the eternal land of inexhaustible bliss, marks the second stage of his God-love, namely 'Para Jñāna', in full swing (vide aphorisms 230 and 231 of Ācārya Hṛdayam).

(iv) *The bliss eternal*: The eternal land (Heaven) is the abode of unalloyed bliss interminable, the diametrically opposite of Earth, the harrowing abode of endless misery and nothing but that. The so-called enjoyment, resorted to and indulged in, by the folks over here is nothing but misery under the cloak of enjoyment, pain in the garb of pleasure. When King Pāṇḍu aimed an arrow at a deer, the dying deer exclaimed: "A Ṛṣi that I am, my wife and I could snatch just a little time for sexual enjoyment and we disguised ourselves as deers, for this purpose. And this rare moment, one in a thousand, alas! You didn't allow us to avail of. So, this is life!"

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Tenth Centum—Tenth Decad (X-10)
(Muṉiyē! nāṉmukaṉē!)

Preamble

It was indeed a rude jolt to the Āḻvār, who was shocked into a sense of stark reality, when he opened his eyes and found that he was still seated where he was, namely, the hollow inside the trunk of the tamarind tree, in the precincts of Lord Ādinātha's temple in Āḻvār Tirunakari. It now transpired to him that his ascent to heaven, through the exhilarating 'Arcirādi mārga', the honours lavished on him by the various agencies all along the route and at the destination, his stay in the midst of the 'Nityās' and 'Muktās' in the gem-set hall, where the Lord and His Divine Consort were holding Durbar, all these, expatiated on by him in the preceding decad, were but the figments of his imagination, a mere mental comprehension and nothing more. Eaten up by the cruel pangs of frustration at that he is still lingering in the unenviable mesh of 'Prakṛti' (matter), the Āḻvār now cries out his heart unto the Lord, in a manner that is bound to melt even those utterly devoid of tenderness of heart. Oh, what a pity! the Lord, who is fully aware of the Āḻvār's utter helplessness and sole dependence on Him, has chosen to keep him still tethered to the material body. Like unto the suckling, tormented by deep thirst and pinching hunger, despite the parents being near at hand, crying out lustily, the Āḻvār calls out the Lord. Voicing forth his deep yearning with the utmost effort, like the full-throated call for relief from one engulfed by wild fire, the Āḻvār compels the immediate attention and succour of the Lord. It would indeed be well-nigh impossible for the Lord, at this stage, to stick to His seat in Heaven anymore, without responding to the ardent call of a devotee of the calibre of Nammāḻvār.

Weighed down by a gnawing sense of guilt, the merciful Lord, of remarkable tenderness of heart, felt even more depressed than the Āḻvār himself. And so, the Lord and His Divine Consort rushed down, mounted on Garuḍa, flying at supersonic speed. The Lord cut out the Āḻvār's material contacts *in toto* and led him to the transcendental sanctum (Śrī Vaikuṇṭa). And there, in the high Heaven, the ultimate destination of the yearning soul, the Āḻvār entered the august gathering of the great devotees of Lord

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Vaikuntanāthaṇ and mingled freely with them, the joyous intercourse with this holy band in the exalted land, pined for by him since long, thus becoming an accomplished fact. According to the Āḷvār's own admission, in this decad, vide stanza 10, the Lord's love for him outgrew his own and made it dwindle down to naught. The Āḷvār's love for the Lord progressed by stages, as one can perceive, going through the entire gamut of this grand hymnal and currently, it has attained its full stature (Parama Bhakti), outstripping all else, assuming supra-cosmic proportions, even to the extent of enveloping the Lord Himself The Lord, however, forestalled the Āḷvār, enveloped his 'avā' (deep love) and thereby held him in His sweet embrace. In the concluding stanza of this decad, which is also the grand finale of this great hymnal, the Āḷvār gives vent to his sense of completion and fulfilment, saying that he has reached the ultimate destination, all the impediments having been eradicated, root and branch.

The Supreme Lord, Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the Subject sung about in this hymnal which, in the Āḷvār's own words, is styled as 'avāvil antāti', a species of prosody, charged with 'Bhakti', in which the closing word of each song is the opening word of the next one. Saint Śathakopa, the Lord's own poet, endowed by Him with divine knowledge, full and perfect, clear and concise, is the grand author of this glorious hymnal. The Āḷvār's advent in this world was indeed on a par with that of the Lord, both being due to the great, good fortune of the meritorious 'sādhus', the devout, immersed in incessant contemplation of the divine.

muṉiyē ! nāṉmukaṉē ! mukkaṇ-appā! eṉ pollāk
kaṉivāyt tāmaraik kaṇ karu māṉikkamē! eṉ kaḷvā !
taṉiyēṉ ār uyirē! eṉ talaimicaiyāy vantiṭṭu,
iṉi nāṉ pōkal oṭṭēṉ-oṉṟum māyam ceyyēl eṉṉaiyē.

(X–10–1)

Translation

Oh, Lord of fruit-like reddish lips and lotus eyes, You are the sage,
Contemplating the ways of creation; Internal Controller of all, You stay
Inside the four-headed Brahmā and Rudra, the triple-eyed; Your Form exquisite,

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Like virgin sapphire, You did unto me exhibit
And covertly won me over, dear unto me exclusively like life,
You have on my head alighted and I shan't let You go off ;
Play not your wily pranks on me, in love with you, so deep.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār pleads lustily that the Lord should no longer keep him in bondage, after having spontaneously induced in him God-love and God-hunger of this magnitude. The Lord is addressed, in this song, as the Sage (Muni), Who contemplates and conceives the projects pertaining to the creation of the Universe, its sustenance and dissolution and gets the work of creation and dissolution, discharged by Brahmā and Rudra respectively, permeating their souls as the Internal Controller. There is absolutely no question of parity among Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra and, at any rate, the Āḻvār would be the last person to think in terms of such parity and, much less, throw the slightest hint or suggestion to this effect, seeing that he has already expounded indubitably the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, in I-1, II-2 and IV-10. If the Lord has been addressed in this song (as per the original text) as, "Oh, four-headed Brahmā," "Oh, triple-eyed Rudrā," it only connotes the body-soul relationship of the Lord and His subjects, the entire Universe and all beings therein constituting, as it were, His bodies, Himself pervading them all, as the Inner Controller, the Super Soul, c.f. also VI-9-1 where the Āḻvār has referred to the Lord as pervading the five elements, Sun and Moon, Śiva and Brahmā, as the Inner Controller of them all.

(ii) The Lord's 'Viśvarūpa' (Universal Form) apart, the Āḻvār dotes on His unique Form (Divya Maṅgala Vigraha) of exquisite charm. It is by exhibiting this enchanting Form that the Lord enticed the Āḻvār and made him God-bent, a great gesture of spontaneous grace, bestowed on the Āḻvār, unasked and unsolicited, at a time when he was least inclined towards

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God. And now, the Āḻvār, so transformed, cannot subsist without Him and he will have nothing to do with the worldlings either, in whose wretched company he was wallowing all along. He would, therefore, be neither here nor there, if the Lord too gave him up, after having kindled in him God-love of such astounding proportions that he is seen to possess.

(iii) "*I shan't let You go off*": "Ofcourse, *not at this stage*, when You have weaned me away from my erstwhile plight as a 'Samsāri', earth-bound and sense-buried and, on the top of such reclamation, made me partake of the supreme bliss of intimate intercourse with you. Well, you have also been pleased to bring within my comprehension the heavenly bliss and the exhilarating route leading to Heaven. You shall not give me up, any more." The Āḻvār thus compels and binds the Lord, by reason of his inordinate longing for Him and His inescapable obligation to redeem him. c.f. Bharatā's behaviour in Citrakūṭ, in an all-out effort to induce Śrī Rāma to curtail his exile and go back to Ayodhyā, to take over the reins of the kingdom.

māyam ceyyēl eṉṉai; uṉ tiru mārvattu mālai naṅkai
vāsam cey pūṅ kuḻalāḷ tiru āṉai; niṉ aṇaikaṇṭāy;
nēcam ceytu uṉṉōṭu eṉṉai uyir vēṟu iṉṟi oṉṟākavē
kūcam ceyyātu koṇṭāy; eṉṉaik kūvik koḷḷāy vantu, antō !
(X–10–2)

Translation

On oath do I put Your Consort Divine,
That perfect lady whose locks emit fragrance fine,
Like unto the garland You do on Your lovely chest don;
I put You also on oath, You did court me on Your own
And mingled with me freely as if You and I were one;
Play You shan't Your wily pranks on me any more
But call me up to Your lovely feet, delaying no more.

Note

There was no immediate response to the Āḻvār's call, as in the last song. And so, he repeats that the Lord should not

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side-track him and keep him in bondage, as hitherto, on one pretext or another. The Āḻvār's yearning is so deep that he even binds the Lord and His consort, the Divine Mother, irresistibly upon oath, to fulfil his longing, too deep for words. When the Lord turned round and called the Āḻvār's attention to the impropriety of his binding Him on oath, cutting at the root his essential nature of total dependence on Him as His exclusive vassal, the Āḻvār justifies his stance quite well: The Lord mingled freely with him and loved him even more than His Consort, Mahālakṣmi, completely identifying Himself with him. The up-surge of love unto Him, thus generated in the Āḻvār, grew intense beyond words and it was the exuberance of this love that induced the Āḻvār to move to such incredible lengths for sheer survival through speedy restoration to Him.

kūvik koḷḷāy vantu, antō !-eṉ pollāk karumāṇikkamē !
āvikku ōr paṟṟukkompu niṉ alāl, aṟikiṉṟilēṉ yāṉ;
mēvit toḻum piramaṉ civaṉ, intiraṉ ātikku ellām
nāvik kamala mutal-kiḻaṅkē! umpar anta atuvē! (X–10–3)

Translation

Oh, my Lord, sweet like virgin sapphire, from Your navel did sprout
The lotus stalk that gave rise to Piramaṉ and thro' him,
Civaṉ, Intiraṉ and all else, Who are unto you devout,
And there are the exalted Celestials in Heaven and unto them
Very dear You are; prop unto my life I see not
Any but You. May You, alas! call me up to Your lotus feet.

Notes

(i) Like unto the thirsty who cry out, "water! water!", the Āḻvār, who is God-thirsty, repeats his call for the Lord's succour. Notwithstanding the exuberance of his love for God, it is hardly meet that he should rush unto Him on his own, nor would it redound to the credit of the Lord, if the Āḻvār did so. Therefore it is, the Āḻvār insists that the Lord should come and take him

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on to the heavenly abode. Of course, the Lord could take His own time and lift the Āḻvār up, in due course and there would have been no question of the Āḻvār being so importunate, urging for quick consummation in the manner he is now doing, if only the Lord had not exhibited to the Āḻvār His intoxicating beauty and His immaculate Form of exquisite charm and sent the Āḻvār mad with love unto Him. Even as a creeper needs a prop to nestle around for its very growth and subsistence, the Āḻvār seeks to cuddle round the Lord for sheer survival. Did not Lakṣmaṇa tell Rāma, "neither I nor Sītā can subsist, when apart from You"? 'naca Sītā tvayāhīnā..... "—Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, II-53-31.

(ii) When the Lord turned round and queried whether the Āḻvār had any merit in him, commensurate with the gain aspired for by him, the Āḻvār pointed out that even Brahmā and other Celestials, in the higher echelons, were totally dependent on His grace for whatever they wished to accomplish and that the Lord should not, therefore, expect or look for any merit in him. Actually, the Āḻvār is one better than that exalted band, as the latter would not even acknowledge and declare, as the Āḻvār does, that there is no prop for them other than the Lord.

umpar am taṇ pāḻē ! ō ! ataṉulmicai niyē ō !
amparam, nal cōti ! ataṉuḷ piramaṉ, araṉ, nī;
umparum yātavarum paṭaitta muṉivaṉ-avaṉ nī;
emparam cātikkaluṟṟu, eṉṉaip pōra viṭṭiṭṭāyē. (X-10-4)

Translation

My Lord, You are the Controller great of one and all,
The primordial matter and the myriads of souls lodged therein,
The spatial ether, the radiant fire and other elements as well,
The cosmic egg which holds Piramaṉ, Araṉ and others within,
The sage You are, Who did create the Devas, the humans
And the other species, keeping in mind their past actions;

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To salve me You did come forward, on Your own
But still you do keep me here, lingering on.

Notes

(i) In a vacant piece of land one can raise any crop according to one's predilection, and so, in the vast vacant land of Primordial Matter (Mûla Prakṛti) can be sown multifarious seeds, yielding a vast variety of crops of enjoyment as well as emancipation, that either bind the souls, the tenants tilling the soil, or work up to their release from such bondage.

(ii) Unto the Lord, the Universal Controller, the Matter, the elements emanating therefrom, the different species of beings inhabiting the created worlds with their colourful varieties, all these constitute, as it were, His bodies, and He is the Super-Soul, pervading them all.

(iii) So far as the Āḻvār is concerned, he is fully aware, against the background, set forth above, that the Lord is very keen to salve him and yet, he is indeed puzzled why he is still kept on, in this abode. "Does it not smack of indifference on Your part?" the Āḻvār is now asking the Lord.

põra vittiṭṭu eṉṉai nī puram põkkaluṟṟāl, piṉṉai yāṉ
āraik koṇṭu ettai? antō! eṉatu eṉṉatu eṉ? yāṉ eṉṉatu eṉ?
tīra irumpu uṇṭa nīr-atu põla, eṉ ār uyirai
ārap paruka, eṉakku ārā-amutu āṉāyē ! (X-10-5)

Translation

You are unto me the nectar insatiable,
That does fully quench my God-thirst abnormal,
Like the red-hot iron having its fill, jolly well,
When dipped in water and yet if You , my Lord,
Gave me up and kept me aside, [in sensual pleasures buried,]

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What can this frail being achieve and by what means?
Alas! what am I and what is mine?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār deplores his sad plight; he feels that he has been woefully despised by the Lord, despite His role as the great Universal Protector and His omni-potence, reducing him to the unenviable predicament in which he finds himself nowhere. Neglected by the Lord, the Āḻvār betrays his utter helplessness, neither he nor any one else can help him. And so, he feels done up.

(ii) Even as the red-hot iron, dipped in water, drinks all that water, needed to cool it down effectively, the Lord exhibited His exquisite charm to the Āḻvār, so as to entice his soul and consume it, in full.

eṉakku ārā-amutāy, eṉatu āviyai, iṉ uyirai,
maṉakku ārāmai maṉṉi, uṇṭiṭṭāy; iṉi uṇṭoḻiyāy-
puṉak kāyā niṟatta, puṇṭarīkak kaṇ, ceṅkaṉivāy,
uṉakku ēṟkum kōla malarppāvaikku aṉpā! eṉ aṉpēyō!
(X-10-6

Translation

Oh, Lord of lily hue, lotus eyes and reddish lips beautiful!
Dear unto the lotus-born Divine Mother, matching You so well,
Unto me You are love incarnate, the nectar insatiable,
You did consume alike my material body and soul delectable
And still feel that You didn't have Your heart's fill,
You have perforce to consume what remains of me still.

Notes

(i) If the Lord loved His Consort, Mahālakṣmi intensely, He was the very personification of love unto the Āḻvār. That being the case, the Āḻvār rightly points out to the Lord that He can ill-afford to despise him now.

(ii) Unlike the nectar that was once churned from the Milk-ocean and distributed to the Devas, the Āḻvār enjoys

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the Lord's nectarean charm, in an ever increasing measure, it being ever fesh and inexhaustible. What a grand setting indeed! The lotus-born Mahālakṣmi, a perfect match unto the Lord of exquisite charm, of the complexion of the lily in fresh bloom, the eyes resembling the red lotus flower, just blossomed, and the lips, radiant like the red fruit. The Divine Mother is "Bhagavan Nārāyaṇa abhimatānurūpa", as stated by Śri Rāmānuja in the opening line of 'Śaraṇāgathi Gadya'. She is both 'Abhimatha' (dear) and 'Anurūpa' (a good match) unto Lord Nārāyaṇa.

(iii) The Lord's fascination for the Āḻvār did not stop with his soul but extended to his physical body, as well. Even so, there was no satiety for Him and seeing this, the Āḻvār would urge Him to go the whole hog out and consume him, in full, without throwing him out, half way through.

kōla malarppāvaikku aṉpu ākiya eṉ aṉpēyō!
nila varai iraṇṭu piṟai kavvi nimirntatu oppa,
kōla varākam oṉṟāy nilam kōṭṭiṭaik koṇṭa entāy!
nilak kaṭal kaṭaintāy !-uṉṉaip peṟṟu, iṉip pōkkuvaṉō?
(X-10-7)

Translation

Loved am I by You, Oh, Lord, as the one dear
Unto Your Consort, Lakṣmi, the lotus-born;
You did pull the Earth out, on Your tusks, oh, Sire,
As the blissful Boar unique, like a sapphire mountain
Rising up, gripping two Moons,; the ocean blue You did churn,
Once having gained You, shall I now let you slip down?

Notes

(i) It is a simple, yet irresistible argument, advanced by the Āḻvār. He said: "My Lord, what a mighty exploit You undertook, assuming the form of a great boar with gigantic tusks, protruding miles long, for reclaiming Mother Earth from the deep waters of the deluge! Again, You did churn the very ocean for

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getting at my other Mother, Mahālakṣmi, the lotus-born. They are exceedingly dear to You and likewise, I am dear unto them Therefore it is, You are dear to me and it was no mean effort on Your part to get at me, sunk deep in the ocean of Samsāra, a mighty effort, comparable with your aforesaid exploits. Once bound to You, in this manner, I am indeed very secure; neither You can shake me off nor I can let you slip off".

(ii) *The Lord's advent as the Blissful Boar*: In Tiruvirutttam, the first of the four hymnals of the Āḻvār, he banks upon the grace of 'Varāha Mūrthi', the Lord's incarnation as the Blissful Boar and ends up by reinforcing this point. It is but appropriate that he should revert to this, as he concludes 'Tiruvāymoḷi', the last of his hymnals. The Earth having got submerged under the deep waters of the great deluge, the Lord pulled it out on His tusks; and here is a grand poetic imagery. The Lord, in the form of the magnificent Boar, with two protruding tusks gleaming white, rising from beneath the waters, picking up Mother Earth, is compared to a sapphire mountain rising up, gripping two Moons. While the Lord is compared to a Sapphire mountain and His two white protruding tusks are compared to two Moons, there is no mention of the Earth mounted on the Lord's teeth, as it just faded out of sight in that moon-shine (the gleaming tusks).

(iii) *Churning the blue ocean*: No doubt, it was the Milk-ocean that was churned but it is referred to, by the Āḻvār, as the blue ocean, due to the blue shade cast on it by the Lord of bluish hue. c.f. śloka 45 of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's "Śrī Raṅgarāja Sthavaṃ" (apipaṇipathi bhāvāth.....) wherein the illustrious author describes the dome (vimāna), just above the Sanctum Sanctorum where Lord Raṅganātha reposes on serpent-bed. Although the dome is white, symbolising, as it does, Ādi-Śeṣa of white complexion, yet it gleams splendidly, says the author, like the blue sea,

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because of the upward dispersal of the rays of bluish tint from the Lord's resplendent form of sapphire hue, down below.

perru iṉip pōkkuvaṉō uṉṉai, eṉ taṉip pēruyirai ?
urra iruviṉai āy, uyir āy, payaṉ āyavai āy,
murra im mūvulakum perum tūru āy, tūrril pukku
murrak karantu oḷittāy! eṉ mutaḷ taṉi vittēyō ! (X-10-8)

Translation

You are the Architect of acts good and bad, the souls indulge,
You are also the Inner Controller of the souls steeped in bondage;
Pleasure and pain, for acts good and bad, You deal out,
The Three worlds, the dense bush of Samsāra, You did create,
None can see You but yet the bush dense You permeate;
The Redeemer great, You did in me kindle love for You,
My Prop unique You are, how indeed can I leave You?

Notes

(i) "How can the body outlive the soul, supporting it from within?" queries the Āḷvār. If, at the moment, the Āḷvār is soaked in God-love and he looks upon God as his Sole Sustainer, it is due entirely to the special efforts made by the Lord since long, directed towards the Āḷvār's redemption. When the Āḷvār declares that he cannot let go the Lord, after having been united to Him so intimately, he means to say that he shall not subsist without Him and his very survival is, therefore, contingent upon his union with Him.

(ii) The main purpose of this song would appear to be to bring home to the Lord that He is all in all, the Great Redeemer and Sole Sustainer of all beings and that He should not, therefore, look for any merit, as such, in the Āḷvār, to compel His attention and warrant the influx of His grace.

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mutal taṉi vittēyō, muʼu mūvulaku ātikku ellām !
mutal taṉi uṉṉai, uṉṉai ‹ṉai nāḷ vantu kūṭuvaṉ-nāṉ
mutal taṉi aṅkum iṅkum muḻu muṟṟuṟu vāḷ pāḷāy,
mutal taṉi cūḻntu, akaṉṟu, āḻntu, uyarnta muṭivilī ! ō !

(X-10-9)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You are the triple cause that did usher
The worlds three and all things therein; You pervade all over,
Things and beings, one and all, You control the primordial matter,
As the Primate unique; the sentient beings eternal that enter
The material habitat and direct, with their pervasive power of intelligence,
You ordain; the Causeless Cause unique! to behold the effulgence
Of Your Form unique in Heaven, when do I Your feet attain?

Notes

(i) Transforming Himself, as He does, into the worlds of forms and names, the Lord is the *Material* Cause of the Universe, just like clay for pot, cotton for cloth and so on. The Lord is also the *instrumental cause* like potter for the pots, weaver for the cloth etc. When the period of the great 'Pralaya' (deluge) draws to its close, the Lord, at His sweet volition and 'Saṅkalpa', the wishful thinking, "May I become manifold!", separates into its constituent elements, the whole mass of the enjoying souls and their objects of enjoyment, remembering distinctly the constitution of the worlds prior to 'praḷaya'. The Lord is, therefore, the *operative cause* as well, His jñāna (knowledge), Śakti (power) etc., being analogous to the potter's wheel and staff, the weaver's woof, bobbins, treadle etc. By His transformation into the world of men and matter is meant His immanence, as the Internal Controller of all, revealing the underlying unity of Brahman, qualified by the sentient beings and non-sentient things. He is thus the 'Viśeṣya', the substance present in all things, qualified by the

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'Viśeṣaṇa' or attributes, namely, the sentient beings and non-sentient things. Whatever exists remains what it is, only because of His conjunction and so, 'Cit' (what perceives—the sentient being) and 'Acit' (what does not perceive—the non-sentient matter) constitute, as it were, the body of Brahman, who is the Super-Soul, pervading all over, things and beings, one and all.

(ii) While one can conceive, with respect to the external world of men and matter, the universal aspect of God-head, the Lord's Viśvarūpa or Universal Form, the phenomenon behind the phenomenal world (the one behind the many, the hidden power behind the visible world of objects), the Āḻvārs, on their part, cannot remain content with a mere notional realisation of the Lord, as the all-pervading Force. They all pine for the Lord's special Form, extra-ordinary indeed, His effulgent Form in the high Heaven, like a mount of emerald with sinewy arms, shoulders four, silken robes, the dazzling crown proclaiming His overlordship, lotus eyes, coral lips and so on, in the sweet company of His Divine Consort (Mahālakṣmī), surrounded by millions of 'Muktas' (Releasted Souls) and 'Nityas' (Ever free), in constant attendance on the Divine Couple. c.f. IV-9-10.

cūḻntu, akaṉṟu, āḻntu, uyarnta muṭivil perum pāḻē! ō!
cūḻntu, ataṉil periya para nal malarc cōtī! ō !
cūḻntu, ataṉil periya cuṭar ñāṉa iṉpamē! ō !
cūḻntu, ataṉil periya eṉ avā aṟac cūḻntāyē. (X-10-10)

Translation

The eternal matter that sprawls along, high and low, up and around,
The individual souls whose native intelligence does matter pervade and transcend,
You permeate them all, Oh, Lord, with Your blissful intelligence and sweet will,

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My flamboyant appetite that did engulf all these three Principles,
You did appease, in full, enclosing me in Your sweet embrace.

Notes

It was the exuberance of the Āḻvār's love unto God that egged him on to the extreme length of binding Him upon oath, in the name of His Consort, Śrī Mahālakṣmī, vide second song of this decad. The Lord could not but respond immediately to the ardent call of the Āḻvār, saturated with God-love. And so, He did hasten to the devotee and held him in tight embrace. This was the only way the Lord could avoid being engulfed by the Āḻvār's love for Him, which had, by now, developed to such an enormous extent like whirlwind that it assumed supra-cosmic proportions, transcending all the three entities or principles, namely, matter (Acit), soul (Cit, the Jīva) and Īśvara (the Supreme Lord, the Inner Controller of one and all, the great Ordainer). Finding that the Lord had forestalled him and proved more than a match for him by shedding on him His love, far more intense than even his own, and thus setting him at rest, the Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges the Lord's great gesture.

It is quite an ordinary principle, amply borne out by our everyday experience, that our longing for a particular object, however intense, ceases simultaneously with its fulfilment. In other words, the moment the object of our heart is achieved, the yearning therefor is set at naught—"Iccāyā viṣaya siddhyā nāśaḥ". For example, the thirst is quenched by drinking water and hunger vanishes when one is fed. And so, one way of interpreting this song would be, that the Āḻvār's longing for the Lord, deep and intense beyond words though, ceased when he attained Him. There is yet another interpretation, far more interesting, rather, edifying. It is not as if the Āḻvār's love, which had gathered momentum down the years, had been set at naught altogether but it dwindled down to negligible proportions, when compared with the Lord's astounding love for him, as revealed in the finale of this great saga of Divine Love.

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The Āḻvār's love, which was fast encompassing all the three Principles like the forest fire of menacing proportions, pales into insignificance, having regard to the magnitude and intensity of the love now exhibited to him by the Lord, which is comparable to Śri Rāma's patronising and parental love to Bharata, on their reunion at the end of the long exile. Bharata was lifted by Rama unto his lap and held in sweet embrace, like unto the fond father fondling the child, restored to him after years of separation.

avā aṟac cūḻ ariyai, ayaṉai araṉai alaṟṟi,
avā aṟṟu, vīṭu peṟṟa kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
avā il ăntātikaḷāl ivai āyiramum muṭinta
avā il antāti ip pattu aṟintār piṟantār-uyarntē. (X-10-11)

Translation

Exalted among those born are they, well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand skilfully composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ.
Which mark the finale, the great consummation
Of this God-love, too deep for words, his blissful union
With Ari, the Redeemer great, the Internal Controller
Of Ayaṉ and Araṉ, called out by him with remarkable ardour.

Notes

(i) And now, we have come to the very end of this prolific hymnal, with its scintillating profusion of God-love (Bhakti) in the ascending scale of 'Para Bhakti', 'Para jñāna', and 'Parama Bhakti'. Well, 'Para Bhakti' is confined to the four corners of mental experience and exhilaration, whetted by the alternation of delirious enjoyment of blissful rapport with the Lord (Saṁśleṣa) and bottom-most depths of dejection, desolation and despondency, due to the temporary withdrawal of the glorious vision of the Lord from the mind's canvas (Viśleṣa). The Āḻvār was in this first stage only, right up to the end of the eighth decad of this centum. The next stage of 'Para jñāna' is denoted

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by the devotee's love unto God, overflowing its erstwhile continent of mere mental comprehension, with an irresistible urge for external perception of the divine, in the manner longed for by the devotee; this stage was attained by the Āḻvār only in the preceding decad (X-9). And here, in this decad, we see the Āḻvār in the final stage, known as 'Parama Bhakti', the culmination, rather, consummation of his 'Para Bhakti', when he just cannot exist without the attainment of the glorious end in view, as set out by him in the ninth song of this decad (see the 2nd sub para of the notes thereunder). The Tamil phraseology, "Muṭinta avā", in the original text of this song, is the exact equivalent of 'Parama Bhakti'. As usual, this end-song also sets out the benefit accruing to the chanters of this decad, namely, they will be deemed by the devout, plunged in divine consciousness, as on a par with the denizens in Heaven, the 'Nityas' and 'Muktas', though born in this land of dark nescience. Only the materially-minded worldlings, earth-bound and sense-buried will look upon these chanters as mere fellow-travellers.

(ii) In I-4-6, where the Āḻvār (Paraṅkuśa Nāyakī) sent some birds as her emissaries to the Lord in a fit of desperation, she referred to the Lord as 'aruḷāta nīr' (You, Who wouldn't shed your grace). Well, that was long, long ago, in the early stages of evolution of the Āḻvār's God-love. And now, the same Lord is referred to, by the same Āḻvār as 'Avāvaṟaccūḻ Aṟi' (Hari, the great Deliverer whose all-conquering love has encompassed his own love for Him, of ultra-cosmic magnitude and made it dwindle down to naught and thus pale into insignificance). The Āḻvār called out the Lord lustily, addressing Him not only as 'Hari' but also as 'Haran' and 'Ayan', the last two denoting, *prima facie*, Śiva and Brahmā, respectively, but actually, referring to the Supreme Lord, Mahā Viṣṇu, the In-Dweller, the internal Controller of Śiva, Brahmā and all else in the entire Universe, including the high

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Heaven. As a matter of fact, the Āḷvār has thus provided the clue to the proper appreciation of the Upaniṣadic texts, such as, "Sarvaṁ Kalvidhaṁ Brahmā", "Ayidhatātmayaṁ idhaṁ sarvaṁ" etc., against the background of "Śarīra Śarīri bhāva", body-soul relationship, dealt with, *in extenso*, in the foregoing notes, at the appropriate places).

(iii) Crying out unto the Lord lustily, soaked in God-love, the Āḷvār got all his erstwhile impediments, ills and evils, the outcome of the accumulated mass of his age-long sins, eradicated, root and branch, by the devastating love shed on him by the Supreme Lord and attained Him in that Eternal Land of endless bliss, the Lord Himself being the inexhaustible fountain source of all that bliss. The thousand and odd songs, comprised in this grand hymnal, flowed like a fountain from the love-laden heart of the Saint, the rapturous outpourings, *par excellence*, by-no-means comparable to the poetry of the mundane poets whose chief aim is to amass wealth and power, acquire name and fame, prostituting their poetic talents, in the ignominious process. As a matter of fact, there have been umpteen poets after the Āḷvār and their poems, one and all, are no more than the bellowing of the roaring sea, as compared to this hymnal (Tiruvāymoḷi) of the Āḷvār, whose songs were dictated by his God-love galore. Figuratively speaking, his God-love was the great teacher who made the Āḷvār reel out these thousand and odd songs, one after the other in succession, neatly juxtaposed.

In his inimitable diction, Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Peṛumāḷ Nāyaṇār describes, in aphorism 188 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam', how Tiruvāymoḷi, this grand hymnal came into being. The knowledge, full and complete, clear and concise, imparted to the Āḷvār by the Lord Himself (See I-1-1), blossomed by His sweet grace into 'Para Bhakti' (intellectual love of God) which, in turn, developed into 'Para Jnāna' and 'Parama

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Bhakti ' in the ascending order, as set out in the foregoing notes. So then, the Āḻvār can be likened to a lake, full of water, which successively turned into milk (Para Bhakti), ghee (Para Jñāna) and nectar (Parama Bhakti) and ultimately burst and inundated the outlying area, all around, the bund being unable to contain the upsurge and bombardment of its precious contents. And yet, there is this difference between the lake proper and the Āḻvār, figuratively referred to as the lake. Whereas the lake that breached would cause havoc to the adjoining roads, trees, villages and townships falling within the scope of the mischief of the gushing waters, the Āḻvār-lake, about to burst, was compassionate enough to prevent a similar devastation of the area around. These thousand and odd songs flowed through the lips of the Āḻvār, forming, as it were, the lake-bund. Into these songs, facile words and sweet phrases, competing with each other for participation in the glorious service unto mankind, at large, as intended by the Lord, slipped, as it were, into their proper places, according to the Āḻvār's own admission. Thus, it was the nectarean love for God, welling up the Āḻvār's bosom, that overflowed its continent into these rapturous songs, numbering more than one thousand, the great treasure of divine love. It was not as if the Āḻvār sat in a quiet corner and composed these songs, with a set determination to do so. But it was the upsurge of his devotion unto God, which forced him, as it were, to deliver these songs (Avāvilantāti).

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THE CENTUM IN RETROSPECT
(DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(X-1) : With the clear awareness that the day of his promised ascent to heaven was near at hand, the Āḻvār set about preparing for his onward journey. Finding the Lord in His worshippable Form at Tirumōkūr, as the super-abundant Benefactor with profound knowledge and prowess, capable of steering through all obstacles on the way, the Āḻvār got hold of Him, as the unfailing Escort, during his onward march to the yonder Heaven. Apart from the Lord's attainments, His bewitching beauty is enough to make the Āḻvār follow Him, enjoying His exquisite Form, all along. Such a Lord is lauded by the Āḻvār, *in the opening decad of this centum*, through appropriate songs, set in choice diction;

(X-2) : *In the second decad*, the Āḻvār sings the glory of the Lord, enshrined at Tiruvaṇantapuram (Kerala State) and longs for the felicity of divine service unto the Lord. As we go on, we will find the Āḻvār calling successively at the holy centres of Tiruvāṭṭaṟu, Tirumāliruñcōlai, Tiruppēr and adoring the Lord, enshrined in those places. Having been assured of his ascent to Heaven, at the end of the current span of life, vide IX-10-5, Saint Nammāḻvār quite well knew that the day of his ascent was near at hand. That is why, he has actively embarked on a programme of leave-taking,

(X-3) : The Āḻvār's aspiration for divine service at Tiruvaṇantapuram-as in the preceding decad, did not materialise. So deep was his sense of frustration that it led him to suspect the frightful possibility of the Lord prolonging his stay in this abode. *In the third decad*, the Āḻvār, however, expresses his apprehension in an indirect way, cloaking his own misgivings by referring to those entertained by the shepherdesses of Bṛndāvana. These damsels started nagging Kṛṣṇa, the naughty cow-herd boy, even in the early hours of the morning, the pre-dawn period. The cool breeze is blowing, the koels have started cooing, the peacocks are strutting about and the herds of cows and calves are seen spread out, all over the place. So great is Kṛṣṇa's loving care for the cattle that He would surely follow and tend them, relegating to the background His concern for the Gopīs who cannot, however, brook separation from Him even for a short while. Greatly agitated over the certainty of His departure from their midst on this particular morning also, as usual, they start experiencing the pangs of separation, even when He is still by their side. One of them would lustily plead with Him that He shall not leave them and go out into the fields, firstly, because they cannot bear being apart from Him for a whole day which actually looms like ages in their aching minds, and secondly, because of the lurking danger to His life, at the hands of Kamsa's evil spies and agents, who keep on masquerading in one form or another, all over the place. This decad, however, ends on a jubilant note, with a sense of clarity induced by the Lord's assurance to the Gopīs that He shall not depart from their midst. The Āḻvār's misgivings also stand cleared up, a clarity induced by the Lord Himself.

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(If our eminent preceptors referred to IX-9, as 'Evening brawl', they did label this *decad as* "Morning squabble").

(X-4) j His erstwhile fears having been quelled, the jubilant Āḻvār gets busy in giving the finishing touches appropriate to this grand hymnal of unparalleled sweetness and grandeur. *In the fourth decad*, the Āḻvār sets out the benefits accruing to those pursuing the path of loving devotion unto the Lord besides recounting the benefits showered on him by the Lord, how the Lord contrived to get Himself lodged firmly in the Āḻvār's heart, how complacent He feels after reaching that coveted destination and so on.

(X-5) : Overwhelmingly conscious of the almost immediate prospect of his ascent to Heaven, the Āḻvār tenders his parting advice to the world *in the fifth decad*, the very last in the series of lectures delivered by him for the edification and elevation of the earth-bound, sense-buried men of the world. In this swan-song of the Āḻvār, he calls upon the worldly men to chant Lord Nārāyaṇa's holy names and serve Him, in conjunction with Mahalakṣmī, the Divine Mother, by word (singing), deed (offering choice flowers) and thought (loving meditation).

(X-6) : *In the sixth decad*, the Saint highlights the speed with which the Lord wishes to take him to the heavenly abode. Whereas the Āḻvār was hitherto seeking out the Lord and pursuing Him doggedly, the Lord is now in hot pursuit of the Āḻvār. In the exuberance of His love for the Āḻvār, the Lord would even think in terms of lifting him bodily to Heaven and seek the Saint's permission therefor. How amazing and how incredible that the Sovereign Lord should seek the Āḻvār's permission and want to play the subordinate role! Not finding any one else with whom the Āḻvār could share this wonderful experience of his, he opens up a dialogue with his own God-bent mind and gives vent to his hearty appreciation of the Lord's tender solicitude and amazing simplicity, in this decad.

(X-7) : From his present vantage position, the Āḻvār could prevail upon the Lord to give up His over-ambitious project of lifting the former up to Heaven, with this very body made up of the elements, the 'prākṛtik' nest. That the sovereign Lord should desist from putting through His cherished desire, purely in deference to the Āḻvār's injunction, excites the Āḻvār's admiration of the Lord's amazing simplicity and tender solicitude, all the more. Literally lost in the contemplation of these extra-ordinary traits of the Lord, the Āḻvār could regain his normal composure only after quite some time. Therefore it is, the Āḻvār warns like-minded poets, steeped in the enjoyment of the Lord's auspicious traits, not to get involved in these enthralling traits of the Lord but just skip over them lest they should also get bogged down, as he did. The Lord, who exhibited such a great predilection for the Āḻvār's physical frame, is depicted, *in the seventh decad*, as the One enshrined in Tirumāliruñcōlai (Tamiḻ Nāḍu). The Lord is said to have lavished on the Āḻvār's material body, the aggregate of the love, borne by Him for the sacred centres of front-rank eminence like Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai, Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the Milk-*ocean and* Śrī Vaikuṇṭa, the High Heavens.

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(X-8) : With the stage, now well-set for his Heaven-bound journey, the Āḻvār accosts the Lord and seeks His explanation for His age-long indifference, allowing him to drift so long in this land of dark nescience, in dire contrast to His present hurry to put him in Heaven. The Āḻvār, however, quickly realises that the present dispensation of the Lord is but the influx of His spontaneous grace, totally unrelated to the merit in him. It is this voluntary grace of the Lord that the Āḻvār dwells upon, *in the eighth decad*, and rejoices.

(X-9) : The Lord should have felt embarrassed by the rather inconvenient question put to Him by the Āḻvār, in the preceding decad. He, therefore, tried skilfully to tide over this unenviable situation, by bringing within the Āḻvār's mental comprehension the entire panorama of his ascent to Heaven. The clouds and the oceans roared like an orchestra, heralding the Āḻvār's ascent to Heaven and the inhabitants of all the seven islands, bestowed on him their choicest offerings. The sweet music and the fanfare of trumpets etc., from the land of the kinnaras, Gandharvas and Garuḍas in the upper regions, hailing the Āḻvār's ascent to Heaven, were made to fall on his ears; the chanks and bugles sounded all over, beautiful damsels with spear-shaped eyes sang in chorus the Āḻvār's glory. The Maruth Gaṇas and Aṣṭa vasus kept chanting the laudatory hymns continually. The upward journey to Heaven through the exhilarating route, known as Arcirādi Gati, the propitiation of the Āḻvār by the Angels, *en route*, the Āḻvār's entry into Heaven and the grand ovation accorded to him by the denizens on the yonder side, his access to the gem-set hall, where Lord Mahāviṣṇu holds His ceremonial Durbar, duly conducted by the guides nominated for the purpose, and attainment of the Lord's feet, all these were experienced mentally by the Āḻvār and voiced forth by him, *in the penultimate decad*, in an impersonal manner. He just depicts how, as a class, the devotees of the Supreme Lord, Śrīman Nārāyaṇa are on their ascent to Heaven through this exalted route, exclusively ear-marked for them, greeted all along the route and received with special honours by the denizens of the upper regions, showering praises on the new-comers, so on and so forth.

(X-10) : It was indeed a rude jolt to the Āḻvār, who was shocked into a sense of stark reality, when he opened his eyes and found that all that exhilarating experience, expatiated on, by him in the preceding decad, was a mere mental comprehension and nothing more. Eaten up by the cruel pangs of frustration at that he is still lingering in the unenviable mesh of 'prakṛti' (matter), the Āḻvār voices forth his deep yearning with the utmost effort, like the full-throated call for relief from one engulfed by wild fire. Weighed down by a gnawing sense of guilt, the merciful Lord of remarkable tenderness of heart, felt even more depressed than the Āḻvār himself. And so, the Lord and His Divine Consort rushed down, mounted on Garuḍa, flying at supersonic speed. The Lord cut out the Āḻvār's material contacts, *in toto*, and led him to the transcendental abode (Śrī vaikuṇṭam). There, in the high Heaven, the ultimate destination of the yearning soul, the Āḻvār entered the august gathering of the great devotees of Lord Vaikuṇṭanātha and mingled freely with them, the joyous intercourse with the holy band in that exalted land, pined for by him since long, thus becoming an accomplished fact. According to the Āḻvār's own admission in the penultimate song of *this concluding decad*, the Lord's

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love for him outgrew his own and made it dwindle down to naught. The Āḻvār's love progressed, by stages, as one can perceive, going through the entire gamut of this grand hymnal and currently, it has attained its full stature (Parama Bhakti), outstripping all else, assuming supra-cosmic proportions, even to the extent of enveloping the Lord Himself. The Lord, however, forestalled the Āḻvār, enveloped his ' avā ' (deep love) and thereby held him, in His sweet embrace. In the concluding stanza of this decad, which is also the grand finale of this great hymnal, the Āḻvār gives vent to his sense of completion and fulfilment, saying that he has reached the ultimate destination, all the impediments having been eradicated, root and branch. Thus ends the ' Avāvilantāti', a special species of prosody, charged with ' Bhakti ', in which the closing word of each song is the opening word of the next one.

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APPENDIX

(The 'Ubhaya Vedānta' concept in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism)

1. 'Ubhaya Vedānta'—the two Vedāntas:

The two Vedāntas, which are like unto a pair of eyes, are the Saṁskṛt and the Draviḍian (Tamil) texts, respectively. The Saṁskṛt Vedas are better known than the Draviḍian counterpart and the generality of us are at least aware of the existence of the former, even if they have not been studied, as such, and much less, delved into. For resolving the doubts and difficulties, which might arise in the interpretation of the 'Karma-Kāṇḍa' of the Saṁskṛt Veda, dealing with the rites and rituals, in propitiation of 'Brahman' (God), Sage Jaimini brought out a work, known as 'Pūrva Mīmāṁsā Śāstra'. Likewise, Sage Vyāsa produced the '*Śārīraka* Mīmāṁsā' *alias* 'Uttara mīmāṁsā Śāstra', as an aid to the proper understanding of the 'Brahma Kāṇḍa' (Upaniṣads) expatiating on the glory of 'Brahman'. It is this glossary, that is commonly referred to, as the 'Brahma Sūtra' or 'Bādarāyaṇa Sūtra' The elucidation, furnished in the 'Brahma Sūtras', is indispensable to the Vedāntins who aspire for a proper appreciation and understanding of the Supreme Reality, the final goal and the infallible means of attaining it, as set out in the 'Upaniṣads'. In fact, only those, well-versed in the 'Brahma Sūtras', are known as 'Vedāntins' or Brahma Jñānis'. In order to bring the cardinal principles and tenets, embedded in these Sūtras, within the fair grasp of all, the three great exponents of the Vedic religion, Śrī (Ādi) Śaṅkarācārya, Śrī Rāmānujācārya and Śrī Ānanda Tīrtha (Madhvācārya) with Advaitik, Viśiṣṭādvaitik and Dvaitik approach respectively, have brought out their own commentaries of the 'Brahma Sūtra'.

It is noteworthy that, unlike the names given to the commentaries of others viz. Śaṅkara Bhāṣya, Madhva Bhāṣya, Nīlakaṇṭa Bhāṣya and so on, the commentary of Śrī Rāmānuja is known as 'Śrī Bhāṣya'. To the Śrīvaiṣṇavites, that is to say, the Viśiṣṭādvitins, who are the followers of 'Śrī Rāmānuja, 'Śrī Bhāṣya' is the great sustainer. It would be significant to mention, at this stage, that it has evoked the admiration of even Western Philosophers of the calibre of Prof. Maxmuller, Dr. Thibaut etc. Extracted below is the mature verdict of Prof. Maxmuller, resulting from years of dedicated deliberations, set forth in his very last work, "The six systems of Indian Philosophy—Page 245."

"We ought, therefore, to look on Rāmānuja as a perfect equal of Śaṅkara, so far as his right of interpreting Bādarāyaṇa's Sūtras, according to his opinion, is concerned. It is the same here, as everywhere, in Hindu Philosophy. The Individual philosopher is but the mouthpiece of tradition and that tradition goes further and further, the more we try to fix it chronologically. While Śaṅkara's system is Advaita' (i.e.), absolute monism, that of Rāmānuja has been called Viśiṣṭādvaita, the doctrine of unity with attributes or monism with a difference. Of course, with Rāmānuja also, Brahman is the highest reality, Omni-potent, Omni-Scient, but this Brahman is, at the same time, full of compassion or love. *This is a new and very important feature* in Rāmānuja's Brahman, as compared with the icy self-sufficiency, ascribed to Brahman by Śaṅkara.

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Even more important and more humanising is the recognition that souls, as individuals, possess reality, that 'Cit' and 'Acit', what perceives and what does not perceive, soul and matter, forming, as it were, the body of Brahman, are, *in fact, modes (Prākāra) of Brahman*".

The portion italicized in the above extract, namely, "This is a new and very important feature", has to be taken to mean that this feature of Vedānta had failed to receive proper treatment at the hands of the earlier monistic philosophers and it was left to Śrī Rāmānuja to expound it. Indeed, the doctrine of a loving God is as old as the Vedas. Not to cite many passages, one alone from the Ṛig-Veda (ix-32-5), (Yoṣājāramivapṛyaṁ), avers that love between God and souls is as fervid as between a lover and his beloved. As a matter of fact, Sage Bodhāyana compiled a copious guide to the 'Brahma Sūtra'. It was reproduced by sages Taṅka, Dramiḍa, Guhadeva and others, in a condensed form. Śrī Rāmānuja set unto himself the task of bringing out his commentary (Śrī Bhāṣya) along the lines adopted by these Ṛṣis. While this is not the place to expatiate on the greatness and grandeur of 'Śrī Bhāṣya', it would be quite pertinent to point out that Śrī Rāmānuja, as the propounder of the Viśiṣṭādvaitik method of interpreting the Vedānta Sūtras, was largely inspired by the intuitive experiences and mystic utterances of that great Sage-poet Śaṭhakopa, better known as Saint Nammāḷvār. One might wonder how, of all the commentators, Śrī Rāmānuja alone was able to go through the entire gamut of the *Śrutis* and get hold of the relevant '*Ghaṭaka Śrutis*', the cementing texts, such as '*yasya ātmā Śarīram*', '*Yasya pṛtivi Śarīram*', '*ya ātmani thiṣṭan*', synthesising the various seemingly conflicting texts, the '*abedha Śrutis*', suggestive of the existence of no more than that single entity—'*Brahman*' and the '*bedha Śrutis*', high-lighting the difference between *Brahman*, the Supreme Lord, on the one hand and the Sentient and non-sentient beings, on the other. It is indeed unique, the aura of judgement with which he has wound up each one of his commentaries on the Vedānta Sūtras, declaring, 'Itisarvaṁ samañjasaṁ', that is, everything has thus been reconciled. It may be mentioned, in passing that those other systems of philosophic thought, which are either alien to the Vedas and heretical or are distorted interpretations of the vedic texts, have also been duly refuted by Śrī Rāmānuja, in his 'Śrī Bhāṣya'.

2. It was not as if the '*Ghaṭaka*' or the cementing texts, bridging the gulf between the '*abedha*' and '*bedha*' śrutis and reconciling them, were not already there for other commentators to see but it can be safely asserted that Śrī Rāmānuja's special attention was drawn to them by Saint Nammāḷvār, right at the commencement of Tiruvāymoḷi. In the very first decad of the first centum of this scintillating hymnal, the Saint has admirably conveyed the contents of the '*ghaṭaka Śruti*' in the compact Tamil expression, 'Uṭalmicai Uyirena'. This conveys the truth that God permeates everything like unto the soul permeating the body, the body-soul relationship (Śarīra Śarīri bhāva), which is the key to Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy. Later on, the Saint expands this idea by referring to God as the ghee remaining latent in the fresh-drawn milk, so on and so forth. As a matter of fact, this body-soul relationship, already dealt with in Subālopa niṣad and Antaryāmi Brāhmaṇa etc., was expounded by Nammāḷvār, in more than twenty stanzas of Tiruvāymoḷi. Śrī Rāmānuja's Brahman (God) was the same

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postulated, rather revealed and revelled in, by all the love-intoxicated Saints that went before him, the monarch of whom was Saint Nammāḷvār—a God, full of compassion and a host of other auspicious traits, the repository of all conceivable excellence, immeasurable and unlimited, in dire contrast to the icy-cold, abstract God, formless and colourless, conceived by Śrī Śaṅkara. In Tiruvāymoḷi, the opening line itself throws open the flood-gate of the mystic vision of the Lord, conceived as the abode of inexhaustible bliss, that cuts out all fatigue. Actually, the glorious impact of the '*Dramiḍa Vedānta*', the '*Divya Prabandham*' on Ācārya Rāmānuja, particularly, Saint Nammāḷvār's Tiruvāymoḷi (for which there is a peerless commentary, known as Īṭu muppattāyiram), has to be dealt with separately and, *in extenso*. And now, let us pass on to the other Vedānta, the Drāmiḍa Vedānta.

3. *Drāmiḍa Vedānta*· (i) The love-laden hymns of the Āḷvārs, the mystics, soaked in God-love, are collectively known as '*Divya Prabandham*', rightly accorded a stature equal to that of the Saṁskṛt Vedas and, in a sense, even superior to them. The Drāmiḍa Vedānta has an edge over its Saṁskṛt counterpart, by virtue of the former's clear and straightforward exposition of the Vedic truths, shorn of all quibblings and equivocation. Extending the comparison a little further, it may be pointed out that the Āḷvārs occupied a unique position to which the Vedic Ṛṣis could make no pretensions. Unlike the Ṛṣis, who had to attain to a standard of near perfection through their own efforts and personal equipment, the Āḷvārs were blessed with a full and complete knowledge of God-head and the Śāstras in all their ramifications, by a self-revealing God, the fountain-head of all knowledge and hence the superior excellence of their Songs Divine. The four thousand hymns of these seer-poets constitute a veritable treasure of divine knowledge, full of light, love, beauty, harmony and bliss. All the Vaiṣṇavas sing in chorus these inspired songs which flowed from the sacred lips of the Āḷvārs, at home and in the temples, in all worships, ceremonies and rituals, and none can fail to feel the thrill of divine presence, wherever they are sung. Śrī Vedānta Deśika, the great Vaiṣṇava Ācārya, a veritable lion among poets and logicians, has gratefully acknowledged, in the opening stanza of his 'Adhikāra Saṅgraha', the unfailing help and guidance received by him from the *Divya Prabandham*; he exlaims that these inspired hymns have resolved all doubts by shedding adequate light on the moot points, the dark corners, the by-lanes and slippery spots in the Saṁskṛt Vedas. Two works of this literary giant, entitled 'Dramiḍopaniṣad Sāram' and 'Dramiḍopaniṣad Tātparya Ratnāvali' purvey to the scholars of the Saṁskṛt-knowing world the salient teachings of Nammāḷvār, keeping them all spell-bound.

(ii) The Sweet-sounding hymns of the '*Divya Prabandham*' are couched in the seemingly simple Tamil language and yet, they would not have yielded their real contents to the lay public, but for the great commentators-the versatile stalwarts of the calibre of Periyavāccān Piḷḷai, acclaimed as the prince among commentators, Vaṭakku Tiruvīthipiḷḷai of cryptic memory, who could faithfully reproduce, *in extenso*, the elaborate discourses of Nampiḷḷai on '*Tiruvāymoḷi*' and others. But, then, these commentaries, copious and illuminating though, are in what is known as '*maṇipravāḷa*' style, an admixture of Tamil and Saṁskṛt, besides being replete with quotations from several other works, the Saṁskṛt

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Vedas, the Śāstras, the *Itihāsas*, *Purāṇas* etc., not to mention the peculiarities of the dialect, current in those good olden days. For a proper appreciation of these commentaries and deriving the maximum benefit, all by oneself, one has to possess the requisite equipment or, alternatively, study at the feet of great and competent scholars for quite some years. This is hardly possible for most of us in the modern age, notorious for its stress and strain, the old order of things, particularly, the traditional course of instructions in those pristine environments having been replaced by modern Schools and Colleges

(iii) At this stage, it seems necessary to eliminate even that little bit of risk namely, contamination of public thinking in regard to the exalted status of the hymns of the Āḻvārs, which enjoy parity with the Saṁskṛt Vedas and the stature of the Āḻvārs themselves. The expression 'Āḻvār' means one who has taken a deep plunge into the nectarean ocean of the Lord's innumerable auspicious attributes and His great glory. Being over-whelmed by an insatiate longing for incessant communion with God, the Āḻvārs not only remained immersed in such devout contemplation but literally got dissolved in the Lord, like milk, honey, sugar-candy and porridge. Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition has fixed the number of the Āḻvārs, once for all, as twelve, since their peerless devotion is deemed unapproachable by ordinary, bound souls, however exalted be their illumination and purity. It is held that they are the eternal, ever-free angels in Heaven, very near and dear to the Lord who once, at His behest, came down in human form, to demonstrate, both by precept and example, the nature of true devotion to the benighted and erring mortals below. Fifth in the chronological order, in which the Āḻvār Saints are said to have made their appearance in this abode of ours, came Māraṉ, later known as Śaṭhakopa (the one who overcame the mischief of the ill-wind, known as 'Śaṭha', in Saṁskṛt parlance, that deals a deadly blow to the babe just emerging from the mother's womb and makes it forget its past life) and Saint Nammāḻvār. Born of parents who were mere peasants, at the beginning of the current spell of kaliyuga, deep south in Tamil Nādu (Kurukūr, also known as Āḻvār Tirunakari), Māraṉ became a problem child unto his parents who had fervently prayed to Lord Viṣṇu for progeny. The child would not drink even the mother's breast-milk when offered, would not speak, would sit, if seated, stand, if made to stand on the legs, lie down, if put to bed and, in short, it made no movement on its own. In sheer despair, the parents took the child to the local temple of Lord Ādinātha, deposited it on the floor and prayed to the Lord, their eyes remaining closed, rapt in meditation. But, when they opened their eyes, they did not find the child. To their utter surprise, they discovered the child, seated in a lotus posture (Padmāsana) inside the hollow of a tamarind tree in the quadrangle of the temple, absorbed in yogic meditation. The young Saint is said to have remained in the same posture for thirty two years, meditating on Lord Viṣṇu and communing with Him, prior to his ascent to the Lord's lotus feet in Heaven.

An elderly brahmin (later known as Madhurakavi Āḻvār), also born near Kurukūr, the birth place of Nammāḻvār, who was sojourning in Northern India, witnessed one day the unusual phenomenon of a resplendent sun in the southern horizon. Struck by great wonder, the Elder moved, on and on, towards this unprecedented source of rare brilliance and eventually reached his destination,

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namely, the tamarind tree in the temple at Āḻvār Tirunakari. Coming face to face with the juvenile Saint, sitting motionless inside the hollow of the tree, almost insensate, the perseverent visitor wished to know whether the youngster was at all alive. When queried by the new-comer, "Sire ! if the little one is born in the womb of the dead (inert) matter, what will the former feed on and where will it lie?", pat came the answer from the Saint, equally cryptic, "that it will eat and there it will lie," signifying that the 'Jiva' (individual soul, sub-atomic in size) imbedded in inert matter, will partake of the characteristics of matter and literally get lost in it. Realising that he had, at long last, got hold of the master, the spiritual mentor he was in search of, the Elder stayed on, listening to the rapturous out-pourings from the love-laden heart of the Saint and swearing undivided allegiance to him, relegating even God to a secondary place. This is borne out by the sweet-tongued Elder's own hymn of remarkable fervour (11 verses), captioned "Kaṇṇinuṇ Ciruttāmpu" History has it that at a time when the four thousand hymns of the Āḻvārs had faded out of existence, Śrīman 'Nāthamuni (10th Century) propitiated, by dint of his yogic powers, Saint Nammāḻvār, right in front of the holy tamarind tree inside the temple at Āḻvārtirunakari, by reciting the aforesaid eleven verses of Madhurakavi Āḻvār, in adoration of the great master, as many as twelve thousand times. As a result of this yoga, Nammāḻvār appeared before Śrīman Nāthamuni and recited the four thousand hymns composed by all the Āḻvārs put together. Having collected these hymns in this extraordinary manner, Śrīman Nāthamuni handed them down to posterity, in an unbroken succession down to this day, vide 'Guruparamparā prabhāvam-6,000 granthas' as well as 'Guruparamparā Sāram' of Śrī Vedānta Deśikar. It was, in this very context, that Nammāḻvār came to be extolled as the Chief of the clan of 'Prapannas' and looked upon as the figurative embodiment, within himself, of all the Āḻvārs, he being the body and the other Āḻvārs, the limbs thereof His hymns are regarded as having the sanctity of the Vedas, being on a par with the Saṁskṛit Vedas, while those of the other Āḻvārs are treated as the 'Vedāngas' (ancillaries). No doubt, all the Āḻvārs were imbued with divine fervour of a very high order, having taken a deep plunge into the oceanic bliss of God-love. And yet, it has to be conceded that, for sheer philosophical profundity and mystic fervour, Nammāḻvār stands apart from the other Āḻvārs, on a pedestal of his own. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, who flourished in the Vaiṣṇavite firmament nearly nine hundred years ago, has referred, in his laudatory hymns, known as 'Śrī Raṅgarāja Stava', to the Icons (idols) of Nammāḻvār and the other Āḻvārs, enshrined in one part of the spacious temple in Śrīraṅgam. As already stated, Sri Ramanuja made admirable use of 'Tiruvāymoḻi' and looked upon it as a sure and certain guide in resolving many an abstruse point while writing out his commentary (Śrī Bhāṣya) on the Brahma Sūtras. Therefore it is that he issued a mandate, as it were, in the last of his nine works, namely, the '*Nitya Grantha*' depicting the daily routine to be followed by the devout, that recital of the hymns of Āḻvārs, sweet to hear, (*Śrutisukhaṁ*, in Saṁskṛt, and *Cevikkiniya Ceṉcol*, in Tamil) should form an integral part of the daily worship which would otherwise be fruitless and insipid. That great savant, Śrī Āḷavantār, (Yāmuna) of vast and unfathomable learning, looked upon Nammāḻvār, as 'All in-one', the sum-total of all happiness, derived through earthly relations and riches, in just the same way as the Āḻvār

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comprehended the Supreme Lord. And then, none can fail to notice the enormous depth of devotion of Kūrattāḷvān, the illustrious father of Parāśara Bhaṭṭar and a disciple very close to Śrī Rāmānuja. In Āḷvān's Saṁskṛt hymns, the manner in which he adores Nammāḷvār, every now and then, is unique.

(iv) *The foster-mother*: Śrī Rāmānuja has been acclaimed by his contemporaries, as the foster-mother, who nourished the 'Divya Prabandham' with the utmost zeal and devotion. The invocatory stanzas, which are recited before chanting 'Tiruvāymoḷi' and 'Periya Tirumoḷi', the grand apocalypse of Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār, echo this sentiment and even go to the extent of praying unto Śrī Rāmānuja to grant the votaries the requisite strength of memory for retaining, in their minds, the hymns of the Āḷvārs. Indeed, this redounds to the credit and glory of Śrī Rāmānuja, who spared no pains to ensure the intensive and systematic propagation of the hymns in the various pilgrim centres, dissemination of their inner (esoteric) meanings through elaborate commentaries and so on. But for Śrī Rāmānuja's unremitting zeal and attention, in this direction, the 'Divya Prabandhas' might have been, once again, confined to the limbo of oblivion, as did happen in the days before Śrīman Nāthamuni.

(v) Oh, what a spell!

For the proper sustenance and nourishment of God-love, the 'Divya Prabandham' of the Āḷvārs stands right on top. Even the mere text, let alone the meaning thereof, makes enchanting reading, and those, who follow the meaning also and delve into it, are bound to get themselves transported to the region of ecstasy. No wonder, therefore, our Pūrvcāryas—Śrīman Nāthamuni, Yāmuna, Rāmānuja, Kūrattāḷvān, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar and other great scholars had an abiding interest in, and marked partiality for the hymns of the Āḷvārs, despite their own profound learning in the Saṁskṛt vedas and virtual mastery over all the Śāstras. It is always up to us to freely partake of the sumptuous repast, served to us by these great preceptors, by dint of their delving deep into the oceanic depths of not only the Saṁskṛt Vedas but also the Dramiḍa Vedas. It is worth recalling in this connection the emotional upsurge and rapturous delight of a North Indian disciple, on his initiation into the beauty of beauties, which 'Tiruvāymoḷi' undoubtedly is. Śrī Śudarśanācārya Śāstri, a staunch disciple of the famous (late) Govardhanam Rangācāriyār Swāmi, the founder of Rangji Mandir at Vṛndāvan (uttara pradeś), studied 'Bhagavad Viṣayaṁ', the commentary on 'Tiruvāymoḷi', at the feet of the master. The entraptured disciple gave vent to his reactions through ten Saṁskṛt ślokas, the gist of which is given below:

"Of the numerous Śāstras, extant in this world, none is comparable to the excellence of the 'Divya Prabandams' of the Āḷvārs. Those, who have written Commentaries for these hymns of the Āḷvārs, are the real 'Brahma-Jñānis'. Only those, who are endowed with the capacity to drink deep of this insatiable nectar-the hymns of the Āḷvārs and the illuminating Commentaries thereof—can justify their existence as well-merited. Oh, what a pity! Tamil is not my mother tongue, born as I was in this part of the country. I, however, revel in the thought that I have been fortunate enough to listen to these marvellous

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discourses of the Swāmiji, unravelling this priceless treasure. Oh, Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, as one who has taken refuge at the feet of the Govardhanam Swāmi, I have not the slightest doubt about my attaining 'Mokṣa' at the end of the current span of life. And yet, oh, Lord, I entreat you, with all the fervour at my command, taking your feet firmly in my hands, that you shall not grant me 'Mokṣa', at the end of this life of mine. Pray, let me be reborn in that part of the country, where Tamil is the regional language, the country which reverberates with the sweetness emanating from the hymns of the Āḷvārs, so that I may acquire a complete mastery over all the four thousand stanzas and be openly acclaimed as an 'Adhyāpaka' (Master) of the four thousand hymns. Let me sing these songs all the time, to my heart's fill, not only in one birth but in a number of births, say, seven or eight more, before reaching my ultimate destination. If, however, you grant me 'Mokṣa' right now, I will surely get back to Earth, setting at naught the upaniṣadic text 'Nacapunarāvartate' and also the Brahma Sūtra,'Anāvṛtti Śabdāt', which declare that the High Heavens form the Eternal Land whence there is no returning and those who have reached this ultimate destination are not reborn elsewhere (the dreadful cycle of birth and rebirth grinding to a halt). Yes, I will scrap all these edicts and take rebirth either on the banks of the river Tāmraparṇi (the birth place of Nammāḷvār) or the river Kāvēri or near about Śrīperumputūr (the birth place of Śrī Rāmānuja, the Chief fountain of inspiration for the study of Divya Prabandhas)".

4. Praise heaped on Divya Prabandhas by the Saṁskṛt Vedas and Purāṇas

The Vedic texts have, in several places, proclaimed the glory of 'Tiruvāymoḷi'. In the first *praśna* of '*Kāṭhaka*' portion of '*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*', which is quite familiar to the students of the Veda, comes the episode of Indra disabusing Bharadwāja of the possibility of the latter mastering the Vedas, even if his span of life were extended beyond the tenure of three hundred years already granted to him. The episode ends up with the greatly disappointed Bharadwāja ultimately attaining salvation through a study of Tiruvāymoḷi, taught to him by Indra. In other words, this is the episode of Bharadwāja's initiation into 'Savitur Vidyā', as Tiruvāymoḷi is otherwise known. Śrīman Nāthamuni, in his yogic comprehension of Saint Nammāḷvār, rightly saw the 'Savita' (Sun) in him and extolled him as "Yadgosahasram apahanti ..... ", meaning:

I bow, in salutation to him, the Bakula-flowered (narcissus) Nammāḷvār, the Sun beaming through the thousand rays of Tiruvāymoḷi, which dispel darkness prevailing among people, where Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa resides, wielding His discus and conch and surrounded by His entire retinue, the region adored by the Brahmins, learned in the Śrutis, the cynosure of the Celestials". As already elucidated, it was this extra-ordinary Sun, the 'Vakulabhūṣaṇa Bhāskara' (Saint Nammāḷvār), deep down in the South, whose effulgence attracted the elderly Madhura Kavi, the sweet-tongued poet, who was touring in the far North.

In the 'Ṛk', "Sahasra Paramām Devī" of 'Taittirīya Upaniṣad', 'Devī' stands for praise (Stuthi) which the Veda is. 'Devī' is derived from the root

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'Div', which has several meanings, of which 'Praise' is the principal one. The word 'Durva', which stands in close proximity, means "the green one". Indeed, the Dramiḍa Prabandhas are green and juicy. Invocation of 'Durva Devī' can only refer to the 'Divya Prabandhas', a fact which is further reinforced by the phraseology, 'Sahasra Parama', referring to the thousand pācurams (stanzas) of 'Tiruvāymoḷi' c.f. 'Sahasra Śākhām Yodhrākṣith Drāmiḍīm Brahma Saṁhithām' of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar (Śloka 6 of the first centum of Śrī Raṅgarāja Stavam). Even as 'Puruṣa Sūktha' is pre-eminent among Vedas, 'Tiruvāymoḷi' stands foremost among the 'Divya Prabandhas'. Even as the Saṁskṛt Vedas have several roots, the Dramiḍa Vedas have also their roots-the 'Sahasra Śākhā', each stanza of Tiruvāymoḷi being treated as a Śākhā. The expression, 'adhrākṣīth' means dissemination of the 'Dramiḍopaniṣad' by Śaṭhakopamuni, even as the Saṁskṛt Upaniṣads were disseminated through certain Ṛṣis. 'Vedebhya Svāḥ', occurring in the Seventh Kāṇḍa, fifth praśna, is immediately followed by 'Gadhābhya Svāḥ', which, according to Śrī Vedānta Deśikar, refers to the 'Divya Prabandhas'. He has actually used the word 'gadhā', treating it as a synonym of 'Divya Prabandhas', in his 'Dramiḍopaniṣad Tātparya Ratnāvali'.

5. Nampiḷḷai, the greatest discourser of all times on Saint Nammāḷvār's Tiruvāymoḷi, said as follows, while commenting on the last stanza of the illustrious work. "Hundreds of thousands of poets have, no doubt, come into this world after Nammāḷvār and yet, brushing aside their performance as nothing better than the roaring of the sea, if people stick to the hymns of Nammāḷvār, with rapturous delight, it is because of the upsurge of devotion, overflowing its continent through hymns of unparalleled sweetness." This being the case, one just need not be bothered as to when these works came down to us and when the Āḷvārs lived. The Divya Prabandhas are held in rapturous esteem, not only by the entire hierarchy of the ancient Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas but also by the Celestials in the upper regions, as could be seen from the Indra-Bharadwāja episode, narrated earlier. The advent of the Āḷvārs had been alluded to by the Maharṣis in the 'Purāṇas'. Among the Saṁskṛt Purāṇas, Śrī Bhāgavatam is held in great esteem and reverentially recited by all alike—the Smārthas, Mādhvas and Vaiṣṇavas. Śloka 38 and the following Ślokas of Chapter V of the XI Skandham portend the appearance even in Kaliyuga, of Bhaktas who would look upon God Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, both as the 'Means' and the 'End', on the banks of the sacred rivers, namely, Tāmraparṇi, Pālār, Kāverī, Gṛtamālā and Prathīci. It is well-known that the ten Āḷvārs were born on the banks of these rivers. The first three Āḷvārs (Poikai, Pēy and Pūtattālvār) and Tirumaḷicai Āḷvār appeared in the Pālār region; Nammāḷvār and Madhurakavi Āḷvār were born on the banks of the river Tāmraparṇi, Periyāḷvār and Śrī Āṇḍāl, near Gṛtamālā; Toṇṭaraṭippoḍi, Tiruppāṇan and Tirumaṅkai Āḷvārs, in the Kāverī Region, while 'Prathīci', the Western river is said to flow near the birth place of Kulacēkara Āḷvār. Without undue prevarication, by way of discovering the date of the Maharṣi who foretold the on-coming of the Āḷvārs, it would suffice, for the purpose of the present work, to state that the great Bhaktas, whose coming down to Earth was thus visualised by the Maharṣi, and their hymns are of peerless grandeur and unrivalled excellence, irrespective of the age to which they

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belonged. The great preceptor, Empār (Govinda Miṣrar) has elucidated in an isolated '*muktaka*' śloka, as follows:

"Sage Vyāsa explained hundreds of Upaniṣads, in his Sūtras, which he once again expounded in 'Tiruvāymoḷi', reborn as Nammālvār; the third rebirth in the series was in the person of Rāmānuja, for effecting a proper synthesis of the two Vedāntas through appropriate reasoning, reflecting 'Brahman' therein, like a mirror."

Here then is a glorious continuity of authorship, Nammālvār being a reincarnation of sage Vyāsa and Rāmānuja also being a reincarnation of that sage. As a matter of fact, Vyāsa was the incarnation of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa Himself 'Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanaṁ Vyāsam Viddhi Nārāyaṇam prabhum.. . ', "Vyāsāya Viṣṇurūpāya'. The initial unification of the Upaniṣads, in the form of a well-knit garland, known as 'Śāriraka Mīmāṁsā', was effected by sage Vyāsa, who reincarnated as Nammāḷvar and imparted a special aroma to the 'Śāriraka Mīmāṁsā' through Tiruvāymoḷi, sending into raptures even the Celestials in the yonder region.

This has thus brought out the glory of Śrī Rāmānuja, who harmonised the two Vedāntas into an integrated unity through his 'Śrī Bhāṣya'. The veracity of the above observation of Empār can well be inferred from the repetition thereof, by no less than Śrī Vedānta Deśikar in his works and again, by Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa perumal Nāyaṇār, the brilliant author of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam'. It is this synthesis, the glorious impact, in particular, of the Dramiḍa Vedānta on Śrī Rāmānuja, that has imparted a special aroma, a unique feel and flavour to his 'Śrī Bhāṣya' and 'Gīta Bhāṣya', neatly spiced and thus marking them out as outstanding, something refreshingly different from the other commentaries in the field.

6. The unique grandeur and excellence of Saint Nammālvār and Tiruvāymoḷi vis-a-vis the Ṛṣis and their works, namely, the Itihāsa-Purāṇas, known as Vedo-Upabrahmaṇas.

While an insatiate longing for incessant communion with the Lord has been a common feature of all the Āḷvārs, in the case of Śaṭhakopa (Nammāḷvār), it was a veritable extra-sensuous infatuation, an organic craving, a consuming passion, baffling description. Pulsating with God-love with every beat of his heart and panting through every pore and cell of his body, there was an appalling decentralisation of this hectic activity, each one of his senses, limbs and faculties vying with each other and throbbing for quick consummation. The love-smitten Saint would beckon a parrot to carry a message to the beloved Lord on the yonder heights but, in a state of rapturous impatience, actually commission a peacock, near at hand. In their competitive exuberance to get at the Lord, individually and in the quickest possible manner and time, each faculty of the Āḷvār would aspire to transcend its functional limitations, resulting in an overlapping of functions too. The hands would want to praise Him, the ears would pine to drink deep of His nectarean charm, the eyes would like to offer Him fruits and flowers, so on and so forth, a very extra-ordinary state of

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affairs indeed ! (Tiruvāymoḷi III-8). And the beauty of it all is that the Lord responded in a like manner, talking to Śaṭhakopa through His eyes, looking at him through the sweet strains of His flute and so on (Tiruvāymoḷi IX-9-9). Did not the Lord say, in His 'Song Celestial', "Even I, the Omni-Scient and the Omni-potent, cannot express fully how dear I am to the 'Jñāni', because there is no limit to his love." In the same breath, He also declared, "If the 'Jñāni' lovesme so much, I love him even more." (Gītā VII-17) And so, this is a rapport, inherently operating both ways—the direct intuitive experience of the lover and the beloved. It is this Bhakti-rūpāpanna Jñāna or intellectual love of God, that has been referred to, in the opening stanza of 'Tiruvāymoḷi', as 'Matinalam', conferred upon Nammāḷvār by the spontaneous effort of a self-revealing God. As mentioned earlier, tradition has it that the Saint came into this abode within weeks after Lord Kṛṣṇa went back to the Celestium The special fascination, which the Saint, therefore, had for this proximate Avatāra, has been dealt with in the body of this work at the appropriate places.

In his inimitable diction, Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāḷ Nāyaṇār, the illustrious author of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam', brings out admirably the quintessence of 'Tiruvāymoḷi' and the unique splendour and greatness of Saint Nammāḷvār vis-a-vis sages Vyāsa, Parāśara and Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. A study of Tiruvāymoḷi, without referring to this excellent guide, will certainly be very much the poorer for it. Says this brilliant Author, in aphorisms 51 to 83:

"Tiruviruttam", the first of the four works of Nammāḷvār expanded itself into the sweet-sounding 'Tiruvāymoḷi', like unto 'Rg' veda beaming as the tuneful 'Sāma' veda, when attuned to the sweet-sounding notes of the latter. As a matter of fact, 'Tiruvāymoḷi' is said to be on a par with 'Cāndogya Sāmam, of Cāndogyopaniṣad, which is so exquisite as to send the supreme Lord into raptures and made Him declare that, among the Vedas, He is Sāma Veda. (Gītā X-22).

Again, the four works of Nāmmaḷvār correspond not only to the four Vedas but also to the 'Vedo upabrahmaṇas', namely, Śrī Pāñcarātra, Itihāsas and Purāṇas, expatiating on the Lord's bewitching personality, prowess, traits, cosmic wealth and mighty deeds, directed towards the protection of the Righteous, suppression of evil-doers and resuscitation of 'Dharma' (moral standards), as and when they decline.

Whereas the Ṛṣis, with their tapasya-oriented knowledge and the resultant clarity of vision, went on compiling the works uninterruptedly, Nammāḷvār's profound knowledge, which ripened, rather bloomed into super-abundant love for God, choked him down to a state of trance, particularly when he meditated on the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord exhibited during His Avatāra, as Lord Kṛṣṇa. This happened not once but thrice, each spell of such suspended animation lasting as long as six months, the crucial stages being Tiruvāymoḷi,I-3-1, V-10-1 and VIII-8-1. Despite the profundity of their self-acquired knowledge, the Ṛṣis were bound down by 'likes' and 'dislikes' and caught in the vortex of worldly life; on the other hand, Nammāḷvār, with his revelational knowledge, got right on top of the world, well beyond its mischief, disentangled and disillu-

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sioned by a merciful Lord. The Ṛṣis subsisted on the forest produce, roots, fruits and so on, while Lord Kṛṣṇa was the sole sustainer for Nammāḷvār, the food that he ate, the water that he drank and the betels he chewed (Tiruvāymoḷi VI-7-1). The Ṛṣis (e.g.) Vaśiṣṭa, and Vedavyāsa, bemoaned the loss of their sons but the only pangs of grief experienced by the Āḷvār, were due to separation from the Lord during those agonising moments, when His glorious vision went out of sight of the former and the rapport between them got snapped.

Nammāḷvār's works became the cream of the whole compendium of 'Divya Prabandham', even as the 'Puruṣa Sūktam' gets the pride of place, among the Vedas, 'Manu Smṛti' among the Dharma Śāstras, 'Bhagavad Gītā' in Mahābhārata and 'Viṣṇu Purāṇa', among the Purāṇas. Rid of all their erstwhile equivocations and turbidity, the Saṁskṛt Vedas transformed themselves into the four works of Nammāḷvār in lucid Tamil, with a liquid flow and remarkable clarity And this is how it is said to have happened. The Vedas, bespeaking the transcendental glory of the Supreme Lord in the High Heavens, took birth as Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, when the Lord came down to Earth as Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa; the same Vedas appeared as 'Pāñcarātra' to dwell upon the Lord's attributes and activities in His 'Vyūha' or operative Form, when the seat of action shifts from the high Heaven to the 'Milk-Ocean'; yet another allotropic form of the Vedas is the 'Manu Smṛti', dealing with the 'Antaryāmi' aspect of the Lord, as the Internal Controller of all And now, as the 'Dramiḍa Veda', the works of Nammāḷvāi revel in the incomparable excellence, the matchless beauty of the Lord's Arca (Iconic) manifestation, with the characteristic clarity imparted by the Author, the chosen medium of the Lord Himself, sweet like the rain water, extracted from the brackish oceanic waters, ready to be partaken by one and all at all times. Unlike the cosmic Sun, which dispels the external darkness alone, '*Vakula bhūṣaṇa Bhāskara*' (Nammāḷvār) could permeate the inner recesses of human beings and rid them of '*tamas*', the internal darkness.

7. Grace first, Grace last, Grace throughout!

(i) Inspired and illumined by God Himself, Saint Nammāḷvār teaches prominently that the Grace of God is the sole means of our salvation At this stage, it is indeed very relevant to go deep into this matter of 'Nirhetuka Kṛpa' (i.e.) the spontaneous or redemptive Grace of the Lord. We are told that the Lord sheds His grace on us voluntarily and in a manner wholly unrelated to the merit in us. Śrī Rāmānuja used to address the Lord, every now and then, as "Anālocita viśeṣa aśeṣa loka Śaraṇyā", (Śaraṇāgati gadyam-Śloka 5 and Śriraṅga Gadyam, Śloka 7) bringing out the benevolent protection extended by the Lord unto one and all of His Subjects, without distinction of 'High' and 'Low'. Śrī Vedānta Desikar exclaims: '*niṣkiñcchana janasvayam rakṣādhīkṣā*'— "The Lord takes great delight in redeeming, of His own accord, those of us who have absolutely no claim whatsoever to His Grace by dint of our own merit, and has made it, as it were, a creed." This special dispensation redounds to His Great Glory all the more. Our great Ācāryas have, one and all of them, been vociferous enough in emphasising this special trait of the Lord.

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(ii) If the means employed are much-too-slender, in comparison with the mighty dimensions of the end achieved and thus pale into insignificance before the latter, it would indeed be idle, rather preposterous to think in terms of correlating, much less equating the 'means' with the 'end.' The magnitude of the beatific bliss, entailing constant attendance on the Lord in that glorious celestial setting, rules out the possibility of the employment of any means worth the name for achieving it (i.e.) means commensurate with the results achieved. No doubt, the embodied soul cannot but do one thing or another all the time-may be a mixed fare, sometimes indulging in gambling and things of that sort and, at other times, taking to religious pursuits, such as worshipping the Lord and serving His devotees, listening to religious discourses etc. It is not all good or all bad. The very performance of good acts is a reward in itself, as it instils in us a sense of fulfilment. If it also attracts the good-will of the Lord, it is well and good, as He is wonted to lavish on us rewards, hundred-fold. When the reward does come to us, we shall not be foolhardy enough to ascribe it to the merit in us but take it as the merciful dispensation of the Lord. Even those mighty doyens, the veritable store-houses of knowledge, endowed with great spiritual prowess, said in their prayers to the Lord. 'Akiñcano ahaṁ', 'Na dharma niṣṭosmi na cātma vedi na bhakti mām' (Śloka 22 of Yāmuna's Stotra Ratnam), 'Nyasyami akiñcanaḥ Śrīmān!' (Śloka 2 of Nyāsa daśaka of Śrī Vedānta Deśika etc.,) What is the 'Ākiñcanya', referred to, by these stalwarts? If they did mean to say that they had no merit in them to win over His Grace, it has only served to bring into focus the plain truth that, in spite of all their equipment, they were still so infinitely small that nothing but His redemptive Grace could avail.

Again, but for His Grace descending on us, while still inside our mother's womb, we shall never be able to turn our thoughts on 'Mokṣa', the final bliss. At the commencement of the IX section, Upāya vibhāga Adhikāra of 'Rahasya traya sāra', Śrī Vedānta Deśikar has said 'Nidhānaṁ tatrāpi svayamakhila nirmāṇa nipuṇaḥ'. The word 'Nidhānaṁ' means 'Root-cause'. If the Lord is the root-cause for all the good that accrues to us, His subjects, what is the fun in looking upon ourselves as capable of raising in us a spiritual stature, lofty enough to attract His Grace, *ipso facto*? It is just against this background that the Lord is being looked upon, as the 'Ready Means' (Siddhopāya), the Means and the End, rolled into one. The arguments smacking of a *quid pro quo* recede to the background, yielding place to the sure and certain knowledge that His Supreme (redemptive) Grace alone matters. If Nammāḷvār's prayers, in his very first work (Tiruvirattam), for emancipation from this physical bondage impeding his continual enjoyment of Divine bliss, was not fulfilled by the Lord there and then, it was again due to His great concern for the teeming millions of suffering humanity. While granting the Saint, right here, all that enjoyment pined for by him in the yonder Heavens, the Lord deliberately kept him in this abode, for quite some time, so as to get from him all those four scintillating hymnals for the uplift of mankind as a whole. Are not the Āḷvārs and Āchāryas 'Tatva dharśis', mentioned by the Lord in Bhagavad Gītā, the propagators of true knowledge, shorn of doubts and despair, discrepancies and deviations?

(iii) The God, postulated by the Saint, is not that icy-cold, abstract being, divorced from every kind of relation which makes up man's idea of the Divine

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Being. The Lord is most intimately linked up to us, a personal God who is not a mere principle, but one nearest, dearest and most patent to our heart and understanding, holding relationship such as our Creator, our Father, Donor, Judge and above all, our sole Refuge; His greatness lies not in His might and majesty in the celestial setting in the yonder Heaven, invisible and unapproachable, but in His condescending love and redemptive Grace, shed unto the myriads of His creatures, deep down here, sunk in sorrow. As already pointed out, 'Tiruvāymoḷi' opens with a characterisation of God, as an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, the repository of a multitude of auspicious qualities, each one of which is of unlimited dimensions (anavadhika-athiśaya), thereby silencing, right at the very start, those philosophising on a 'Nirguṇa Brahman', an abstract God, devoid of attributes and predications. It is indeed a matter of Grace galore on the part of the Saint, his melting tenderness of heart and boundless compassion for the fellow-being, badly caught up in the unenviable meshes of earthly existence, that he chose to share with the world at large this revelational knowledge, literally, swelling up his rapturous heart and overflowing, so as to be within reach of us all, at this distance of time No doubt, Gautama Buddha too had, out of pity and compassion for the suffering humanity, renounced the regal life of ease and peace and took to mendicancy. But he did not postulate God in his philosophy. Here then is Nammāḷvār, in refreshing contrast, who, even during his ecstatic moments of God-enjoyment, was not unmindful of the worldlings. He would, now and then, address them and, undaunted by their callous indifference, present to them a sure and certain recipe for all their ills and evils, namely, loving surrender to God, with a mind disengaged from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' In the opening stanza of his very first work (Tiruviruttam-100 stanzas), Nammāḷvār, the humble petitioner, begins with the grateful recognition of God's incessant labours, incarnating in ever so many forms to wean away the errant souls steeped in falsehoods, eking out an unholy existence of dirt and devilry through the media of their foul bodies. He also *beseeches the* Lord's condescending attention to his own humble petition to rescue mankind from falling into the pit of inferior births, and worse still, the malignant pit of lust (Kāma) and aimless wanderings away from Him, disillusion and lift them up to Divine consciousness, so as to enable them to drink deep of His insatiable beauty and be rivetted to it. This God-love intensified itself in an amazing manner and grew up to astounding dimensions, as successively revealed by his other works, namely, 'Tiruvāciriyam' (7 stanzas), 'Periya Tiruvantāti' (87 stanzas) and 'Tiruvāymoḷi' (1102 stanzas).

(iv) The growth and evolution of the mental state of the Āḷvār on the spiritual plane, as revealed in his four works, have a strong parallel in the mental attitudes of Bharata. The Āḷvār's state of mind, worked up through 'Tiruviruttam', was like that of Bharata, sunk deep in dejection when his mother addressed him as king, on his return to Ayodhyā, soon after king Daśaratha's demise; in the next work, 'Tiruvāciriyam', the Āḷvār was like unto an agitated Bharata, who, with his retinue, went into the forest and sought out Rāma; in 'Periya Tiruvantāti', the Āḷvār nurtured his God-love, as sedulously as Bharata did, during the long tenure of his stay in Nandigrām where Rāma's pair of sandals had been installed on the throne and his return from exile was eagerly

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awaited. And then comes the finale, the blissful consummation in Tiruvāymoḷi', like unto the reunion of Rāma and Bharata, followed by Rāma's coronation and the due fulfilment of their respective roles in keeping with their essential nature. The love of this super-mystic sitting inside the hollow of the tamarind tree in the temple of 'Ādinātha' in 'Ālvār Tirunakari', became as vast and expansive as the Lord Himself who, as Tṛvikrama encompassed the entire universe, high and low. Verily, the Saint's transcendental love engulfed even the Lord and consumed the very object of love-love, taller than the sky and bigger than the ocean, the very acme of 'Kṛṣṇa thṛṣṇa'—God-hunger and God-thirst. Says the Saint, in the climactic tenth decad of the tenth centum of 'Tiruvāymoḷi', "Once bound to Thee thus, I am so secure that neither Thou canst shake me off nor can I shake Thee off." The wonderful, all-conquering Lord, quick and responsive, could envelop the Āḷvār's love, full and flooding, and it was the ultimate realisation of this fact that led him to the transcendental Sanctum (Śrī Vaikuṇṭa), (Tiruvāymoḷi X-10-10 and 11).

(v) It is with the advent of this Bhakti cult that God-love has become the pivot of religion. Unlike the scholastic or speculative theology, as it is called, which, at best, teaches us to know God and produces learned men, doctors and theologians writing commentaries, mystical theology teaches us to love God (wisdom, matured into love of God), producing ardent lovers of the Almighty devoted to His loving service, the fullest blooming of the lotus heart of man, thirsting for spiritual communion with God.

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